

**THE POLITICS OF PEDANTRY: ENGLISH UNIVERSITY EDUCATION AND THE
RHETORIC OF REFORM, 1642-1660**

by

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This thesis applies the historiography of the early modern public sphere to analyze the political literature which militated for curricular and structural reform of England's universities during the Civil War and Interregnum (1642-1660). The writers considered, who represent the breadth of the political and confessional spectra, advanced a multitude of reform schemes that variably proposed to topple Aristotle from the curricula, replace Oxford and Cambridge with local trade schools and abolish the Bachelor of Divinity degree. Alumni of these institutions led the effort to restructure the institutions but managed to garner wide popular readership amongst individuals who had no experience of university education. This thesis argues that the learned authors manipulated the increasingly popular recognition of a public sphere in order to underline the political threats which scholarly publications, generic conventions and overall "pedantry" in the universities posed to the nascent commonwealth. It further examines how divergent conceptions of the public sphere divided the reformist literature and ultimately produced a body of conflicting proposals for positive reform. This interpretation of the university reform debate thereby challenges the accepted historiography that characterizes the Interregnum as a stable and unrevolutionary episode in the history of the universities.

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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To my parents and my brother,

1.0 INTRODUCTION – “TO PURGE THE FOUNTAINS OF LEARNING”

The academic disputation had, since the Middle Ages, stood as one of the final rites of scholarly passage for baccalaureate candidates at Oxford, Cambridge and nearly all other European universities. Candidates were tasked with defending a philosophical or theological proposition with the extensive training they had received in syllogistic reasoning. In 1653, the year the universities of Oxford and Cambridge received the most withering criticism in popular pamphlets, sermons and treatises, one candidate was asked to defend a volatile proposition: *Institutio academiarum sit utilis in republica* - “The institution of academies is useful in a commonwealth.”¹

Voices from across the political spectrum provided conflicting responses to this proposition during the Civil War and Interregnum. Considering this significant body of popular pamphlets, treatises and proposals for the reformation of the universities, historians have found it surprising that no Parliament actively pursued structural or curricular reform at Oxford and Cambridge in the period. Some have taken this lack of positive policy to indicate that neither the universities’ function, nor their perceived function within English society, underwent any radical change during the political upheaval and reorganization between 1642 and 1660. The present thesis rejects that interpretation and proposes that the fundamental changes that the universities

¹ Univ. Oxon. Arch., 2 a 17, 1648-1659, qtd. in Charles Webster, *The Great Instauration: Science, Medicine and Reform, 1626-1660* (Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1976), 136.

first underwent in the mid-seventeenth century can be best read from the rhetoric which writers deployed to describe them. This rhetoric relied on assumptions about the reading public and the “usefulness” of certain types of knowledge, both of which constitute communicative practices of a “public sphere” in mid-seventeenth-century England. This thesis therefore argues that a considerable literature of university reform from the Interregnum reimagined Oxford and Cambridge as uniquely *public* institutions, which ought to teach *public* knowledge in order to fulfill their obligation to the commonwealth.

Historians studying the history of the English universities in the eighteen years between Charles’ flight from London and the Restoration have focused on the curricular and administrative rearrangements internal to the university faculty, and have not widely considered the public perceptions of the universities with their attendant political implications.² The Civil War and Interregnum, however, present an opportunity for scholars to consider the universities as they were perceived by the vast majority of English people living beyond their walls. The drastic increase in publications that dealt explicitly with political issues in that period provided texts which primarily or tangentially addressed the universities and their reform, alongside those dealing with the clergy, the medical and legal professions and other recognized institutions. The five-fold increase in the number of pamphlets published between 1640 and 1642 indicate a fundamental change in the distribution of political ideas at several levels of the reading populace,

² The most useful guides to the institutional histories of the universities that have been published fairly recently are Ian Roy and Dietrich Reinhart, “Oxford and the Civil Wars,” in *History of the University of Oxford, Vol. IV: Seventeenth Century Oxford*, ed. Nicholas Tyacke (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1997), and Victor Morgan and Christopher Brooke, *A History of the University of Cambridge: Volume 2, 1546-1750* (Cambridge England ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

and the political rhetoric which surrounded the previously rarefied affairs of the universities marks a distinctive period for the study of the popular perception of those institutions.³

A glance at some of the most salient petitions and proposals from that expanding body of literature illustrates the extent to which the general population subscribed to political beliefs about the universities and their reform in the years immediately preceding Charles' flight. Many supporters of Parliament in the early years of the 1640s targeted the universities as institutions in urgent need of sweeping reform. Fifteen thousand Londoners signed the "Root-and-Branch Petition," which explicitly condemned the "corruptions which are in the Universities," among subsequent complaints against the episcopacy. In the same month, the House of Commons congregated a special committee to "consider of the Abuses in Matters of Religion and Civil Government, either done or suffered by the Universities."⁴ By December of 1641, the majority of Commons who passed and distributed the "Grand Remonstrance" employed a stronger language against the institutions by directing Parliament to "reform, and purge, the fountains of learning the two Universities, that the streames flowing from thence may be cleere and pure, an honour and comfort to the whole Land."⁵

This reoccurrence of these images and imperatives indicates the prevalence of political sentiments toward the universities, but it has also left historians understandably curious about the conspicuous lack of structural university reform from London throughout the Interregnum. Direct parliamentary action to reform the universities did not extend beyond the expulsions of fellows who refused to express loyalty to the Commonwealth in the aftermath of the

³ John Emmerson, "The English Pamphlet Trade in 1642," *Script and Print* 33, no. 1–4 (2009): 49–51.

⁴ "House of Commons Journal Volume 2: 22 December 1640," *Journal of the House of Commons*: volume 2: 1640-1643, British History Online, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=9686>. The subcommittee out of which this committee was formed was tasked only with the "Abuses in Matters of Religion."

⁵ Henry Gee and William Hardy, eds., "The Root and Branch Petition (1640)," in *Documents Illustrative of English Church History* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1896).

parliamentary visitations at Cambridge in 1644 and Oxford in 1648. Contemporary commentators themselves recognized parliament's limited reach into university affairs and its abstinence from structural reform. The poet John Hall wrote a proposal to Parliament in 1649 which advocated for a more robust approach to university reform, and recognized its hitherto unsatisfactory policy, "For besides that it reached no further then Politicall aimes...it medled not at all with a view or reformation of those fundamental constitutions, on whose happy or weak designations; the interest and prosperity, the decay and ruin of such litterary Republicks principally depends."⁶ Historians who have studied the universities in the period have shared Hall's surprise at the lack of any fundamental reform. Hugh Kearney summarizes a common sentiment when he states, "Nothing indeed is more surprising than the absence of a radical policy towards the universities in 1641 within the Houses of Parliament. No changes in the curriculum were contemplated."⁷ Following this sentiment in his history of Puritan attitudes toward education in the century preceding the Civil War, John Morgan concludes, "The radicalism of the Revolution simply proved the final catalyst which drove puritans to a scarcely tempered defence of humane learning."⁸

These historians are correct in their conclusions insofar as they consider parliamentary and administrative policies as the only relevant indicators of some revolutionary transformation of the universities in the middle of the seventeenth century. A close reading of the literature of university reform, however, reveals a significant shift in the way people considered the universities and discussed their obligations to the Commonwealth. Historians have not identified

⁶ John Hall, *An Humble Motion to the Parliament of England Concerning the Advancement of Learning, and Reformation of the Universities*, Early English Books, 1641-1700 / 32:11 (London, 1649), 5.

⁷ Hugh F. Kearney, *Scholars and Gentlemen: Universities and Society in Pre-Industrial Britain, 1500-1700* (Cornell University Press, 1970), 100.

⁸ John Morgan, *Godly Learning: Puritan Attitudes Towards Reason, Learning and Education, 1560-1640* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 65.

the revolution taking hold of the universities in the 1640s and 1650s because they have not considered the revolutionary rhetoric which participants employed and accepted to convey their arguments. The language of “publicness,” “privateness,” “obligation” and “usefulness” which pervade the sermons, tracts and pamphlets from across the political spectrum, and which receives extensive attention below, all speak to a revolution in popular conceptions of the university. By closely studying the historically significant language of university reform for its novelty, we can begin to better understand David Zaret’s claim that “institutional and political changes, with which revolutions have been most closely identified, are not necessarily the most fertile ground for exploring a revolution’s historical importance.”⁹

The “revolution” in the way that preachers, poets and pamphleteers criticized, defended and reimagined the universities can be best understood as a general trend in political dialogue during the early Stuart and Interregnum period, specifically emerging from an expanding “public sphere” in England at the time. This notion of a “public sphere” forming in seventeenth-century England originates in Jürgen Habermas’s 1962 book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, translated into English in 1989.¹⁰ Habermas argues that “continuous state activity,” in the form of standing taxes, elections and censorship, provoked the English reading population to “compel public authority to legitimate itself before public opinion.”¹¹ That opinion first found expression in the exponentially increasing supply of newssheets, gazettes and pamphlets in the late seventeenth century, according to Habermas.

⁹ David Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture: Printing, Petitions, and the Public Sphere in Early-Modern England* (Princeton University Press, 2000), 38.

¹⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (MIT Press, 1991).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 18–25.

This theory has since provided a framework for historians to understand the politics of publication and reading in England earlier in the seventeenth century during the early Stuart period, and has been reconceptualized to better allow for gradual historical change within the sphere. Peter Lake and Steven Pincus reconsider the public sphere to be a diachronically changing entity which began with “particularized” spheres of readers receiving and responding to the political gestures of Elizabethan courtiers. As the volume of printed political materials expanded and the possibilities of state control diminished in the Interregnum, these particular spheres coalesced into “a single unified as opposed to multiple public spheres.”¹² In this narrative, the Civil War stands as the pivotal period when *the* public sphere can be first described as a stable and recognizable institution in English political discourse.

Historians and historical sociologists can discuss the seventeenth-century public sphere in such structural terms only insofar as English writers and readers did the same. Scholars applying Habermas’s theory have thus applied a rigorous, empirical analysis of early modern English publications to ground Habermas’s theory in particular practices of writing, printing and reading. Zaret identifies “modes of textual reproduction, rhetorical conventions, distribution and reception” as the empirical indicators of a public sphere that existed both as an economic system for the publication of popular texts and as a collection of “communicative practices” within political rhetoric.¹³ This dual nature of the public sphere requires scholars to study both the distribution of politically-relevant texts as recorded in print runs and book sales, and the emerging rhetoric with which commentators evoked that distribution and its reading public as significant institutions within the commonwealth. The present study, then, accepts the conception

¹² Steven Pincus and Peter Lake, “Rethinking the Public Sphere in Early Modern England,” in *The Politics of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England*, ed. Peter Lake and Steven Pincus (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 10.

¹³ Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture*, 3.

of the public sphere as a series of communicative practices that changed diachronically in accordance with its underlying economy of textual distribution. With this concept in mind, we can begin to read the criticisms of Oxford and Cambridge as expressions of anxiety about the threat which they posed to the public sphere. Similarly, we can read the positive proposals for reform as efforts to reimagine the universities as institutions obligated to interests of the public sphere and to the distribution of “public” knowledge.

The reform authors’ literature is significant not primarily for its insight into the scholarly world as particular public sphere, but rather for its demonstration of a popular public sphere aware of its own existence and of the political ramifications of those outside it. Even if the community of university-educated men did not constitute a politically responsive audience generating “scholarly opinion” distinct from public opinion, the perception that it did compose such a community speaks to the general awareness of a public sphere amongst the authors and readers of reform literature. Both strident critics and conservative defenders of the universities identified the implications which the universities and the education they provided bore on the public sphere. Despite the diversity in genres, authors and political contexts, the rhetoric of university reform consistently relied on readers’ recognition of a distinct public sphere.

The debates between the universities’ critics and the institutions’ defenders occurred across pamphlets, sermons and treatises. Some of these concentrated exclusively on university reform, and some considered it only in the context of the contentious debate surrounding the professional clergy. Insofar as both types of texts contributed to one debate, with its disputants frequently referring and responding to each other, they demand a comprehensive historical examination. Those authors who most frequently recur throughout the present study, such as William Dell and Samuel How, do so on account of the considerable volume of responses and

citations their work generated. I have selected sources both centrally and peripherally concerned with the universities, which spring from a range of religious and political sympathies, both defending and attacking the status quo of higher education at the Interregnum. Since prominent works within the literature would engender several responses and refutations, certain years saw more considerable bouts of publication on this topic, particularly 1653, 1654 and 1659. Nevertheless, the common arguments and strains of rhetoric remain consistent throughout these bursts of printing activity.

While the criticisms of the early Stuart universities and the positive proposals for reformed institutions of learning express a consistent belief in the normative force of the public sphere, the authors rarely agreed on the appropriate participants within that sphere, or on the ways that the institutions could best serve them. Similarly, though critics usually agreed on the threats which the universities posed to the public, they offered conflicting curricular and structural proposals to ameliorate them. To understand both the basis of the unity and the degrees of dissension within the literature, it is thus most helpful to consider the criticisms of the status quo independently from the proposals for reform. I have thus divided the thesis into two chapters, which will treat the unity of the critiques and the divisions amongst the proposals separately.

In the first chapter, I consider the recurring arguments about the conventions of scholarly discourse which critics of the universities advanced to discredit the institutions and portray them as threats to the integrity of the public sphere. I describe how common readers learned to recognize the differences between the scholarly books published by the “learned presses,” and the popular didactic books which often shared the same shelves. Ultimately, I show that the language of both the critics and the defenders, often writing from within Oxford and Cambridge,

relied on common assumptions about the existence of a reading public, even if both groups diverged on the value of that public's opinion. In the second chapter, I explore how sharp divergences in the ways that authors conceived of the English public divided the discourse of positive reform. These divergences emerged from conflicting educational aspirations specific to certain socio-economic groups, all of which vied for admission at the universities in the half-century preceding the Civil War. The educational priorities attributed to clergymen and to gentlemen differed considerably, and reform authors accused their opponents of particularism and opportunism to discredit the curricula which they ostensibly proposed to meet public interests. The analysis in both chapters requires close attention not only to the rhetoric itself, but also to the economics of printing and the 'learned press,' and to the social and demographic history of the universities. This approach will reveal how the nature of the public sphere informed the literature of university reform and allowed a revolution in the way that the English reading public esteemed their "fountains of learning."

2.0 UNIVERSITY EDUCATION AND THE THREAT TO THE COMMONWEALTH

2.1 LEARNED WRITERS AND UNLEARNED READERS

One month into the siege of Oxford, on June 6, 1646, the minister William Dell gave a sermon to the gathered Parliamentary army, extolling each soldier as a “precious stone” in the “Spiritual building” of God’s church, in implicit contrast to the earthly stones of the Gothic edifices in the nearby city under siege. He spoke to the divine force of the assembly, against the “doctrines and traditions” represented by the ancient university which lay on the horizon, explaining:

That where Christ sends the Ministration of the Spirits, there many young people are brought in to Christ, as being most free from the forms of the former age, and from the Doctrines and Traditions of men, taught and received instead of the pure and unmixed Word of God: whereas many old professors, who are wholly in the form, prove the greatest enemies of the power of godlinesse: and thus the *first are the last, and the last first*.¹⁴

By the time the sermon appeared in its third reprint, the title page attached an additional and, in the context, surprising appellation to the author. He had become, “William Dell, Minister of the Gospel; sometimes attending both the generals in the army: and now Master of Gonvil and Caius

¹⁴ William Dell, *The Building and Glory of the Truely Christian and Spiritual Church...*, Thomason Tracts / 56:E.343[5] (London, 1646), 3. 15.

Colledge in Cambridge.”¹⁵ Considering his earlier invective against “old professors” as “the greatest enemies of the power of godlinesse,” his high academic position would strike any of his readers as unexpected. Within five years it would have seemed that, amongst the learned university-men, the first had become last and the last first.

Dell’s academic career proved unique for Oxford and Cambridge during the Civil War and Interregnum. To the disappointment of many reform-minded Parliamentarians, few of their own received academic posts in the aftermath of the mass expulsions following the Parliamentary visitation, at Cambridge in 1644 and 1645, and at Oxford in 1648.¹⁶ As a result, Dell’s writing in the 1650s expresses a tension between the scholarly audiences for his sermons and the “unlearned” readers of his printed works, and between his institutional position at Caius and his sweeping reformist message. In the preface to his London readers in his sermon, *The Stumbling Stone*, published in 1653, he laments how this “Discourse...met with such notable Opposition and Contradiction from the University of Cambridge, to whom it was delivered, and also from such of the town then present, who are baptized into the University Spirits.”¹⁷ The disconnect between his audiences and his message manifests in the seeming contradictions between his arguments and his generic conventions. In his “Tryal of Spirits,” also from 1653, Dell criticizes the common use of Latin phrases and patristic citations in scholarly writings. Yet

¹⁵ William Dell, *Several Sermons and Discourses of William Dell Minister of the Gospel...*, Thomason Tracts / 99:E.645[4] (London: R. White, 1651).

¹⁶ Roy and Reinhart, “Oxford and the Civil Wars,” 728–729; J. D. Twigg, “The Parliamentary Visitation of the University of Cambridge, 1644–1645,” *The English Historical Review* 98, no. 388 (July 1, 1983): 513–28; Charles Webster, “William Dell and the Idea of University,” in *Changing Perspectives in the History of Science: Essays in Honour of Joseph Needham* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1970), 114.

¹⁷ William Dell, “To the Reader” in *The Stumbling-Stone, Or, A Discourse Touching That Offence Which the World and Worldly Church Do Take Against...*, Thomason Tracts / 107:E.692[1] (London: R.W., 1653).

he himself proceeds to refute arguments which claim to *solvere Iesum*. In another text published in the same collection, he extensively cites Chrysostom in Greek marginal notes.¹⁸

The tension from straddling the scholarly writing of the universities and the popular writing of London was not, however, uncommon to his contemporaries. Dell was one of a number of politically-motivated writers during the late Stuart and Interregnum period who used their education at the universities to fundamentally challenge that very learned culture from which they emerged.¹⁹ What was novel in these pamphlets, poems and treatises, however, can be best understood by considering the burgeoning class of non-university readers to whom their authors address their criticisms and reform plans. The gradual shift in the common educational background of the readers of this reform literature presents several questions. How did educated critics create an audience for their message of university reform out of readers with no experience in these institutions? To what political sentiments could they appeal? How did readers themselves come to consider the universities as threats to the newly established commonwealth?

The widely read authors who answered these questions, despite their differences in politics and genre, consistently critiqued the exclusiveness of the learned conventions of scholarly communication. The reform-minded authors, as diverse as John Milton and Thomas Hobbes amongst many more ephemeral writers, all find common ground in their criticism against the exclusiveness and particularity of the learned conventions of scholarly communication. As writers engaging with the expanding 'public sphere,' they could no longer recognize the value of a distinctly learned audience, detached and elevated above popular print. Rather, they wrote

¹⁸ William Dell, *The Tryal of Spirits Both in Teachers & Hearers...*, Thomason Tracts / 111:E.723[4] (London, 1653), 7, 15, 31; Dell, "A Plain and Necessary Confutation of divers gross and Antichristian Errors" in *The Tryal of Spirits Both in Teachers & Hearers...*

¹⁹Nicholas McDowell has written on a selection of these writers and their genre in McDowell, *The English Radical Imagination: Culture, Religion, and Revolution, 1630-1660* (Clarendon Press, 2003).

forcefully against the subversive tendencies of the “pedantisme” and “ragged babblements” which were taught in college halls, and which had largely defined their own university education. This recurring strain of criticism unifies the rhetoric of these writers, all arguing from different and sometimes contradictory political positions, and best characterizes their anxieties toward the universities within the commonwealth. In this way, these university reformists advocated for a more common, and less stratified, public sphere. To understand how these authors could appeal to readers to recognize and distrust the learned voices from the universities, it is necessary to first examine the economies of publication which produced distinct types of texts for different groups of readers.

2.2 A LEARNED PRESS IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE, 1633-1660

The establishment of a “learned press,” initiated by the Chancellorship of William Laud at Oxford in the 1630s and the printing activity of Roger Daniel at Cambridge in the same decade, reinforces the notion of a separate sphere of publications through which the university-initiated could communicate. The goals of this learned press, as it was conceived by Laud and the Cambridge printers, ranged from the “increase of the Christian religion, good letters, and arts” amongst the population, to the more frequently cited “honour of this Place, this Church and Kingdom.”²⁰

²⁰ Simon Neal and Ian Gadd, trans., “The Revised Patent to the University of Oxford (13 March 1633),” in *The History of Oxford University Press, Vol. I: Beginnings to 1780*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013); William Laud, *The Second Volume Of The Remains Of The Most Reverend Father in God, And Blessed Martyr, William Laud, Lord Arch-Bishop of Canterbury*, ed. Henry Wharton and Edmund Wharton (Chiswell, 1700), 58.

Considering his negotiations with the Stationers Company, it is clear that his interest in expanding publication lay in the scholarly respectability accrued by publishing learned texts, rather than in national education advanced by accessible pedagogical material. In 1637, he negotiated the sale of the university's privilege on "sacred books, psalters, grammars" and "books of all kinds which could contribute to the honor of public letters," in exchange for annual payment of £200.²¹ Laud significantly expanded the publication of learned texts, specifically the manuscript archives of Oxford's library itself, and to that end funded a major expansion in scholarly printing activity.²² During Laud's tenure from 1631 to 1640, the printers to the university produced an average of twenty-five annual publications of decidedly more academic quality than the average eleven annual publications of the first decade of the century.²³

Despite this increased production of scholarly books, the project of the learned press failed. The university convocations could not exercise the sufficient authority over their printers to restrain them from attempting to publish to more lucrative, popular markets. Even though some of its products circulated into London, few garnered considerable attention. According to John Feather, only four books published in Laud's Chancellorship "appeared to have had significant commercial connections outside of Oxford."²⁴ At the Cambridge press, the lucrative possibilities of the university's privilege on Latin primers and grammars overshadowed the printer Roger Daniel's ideal learned press in the early 1630s.²⁵ The printers could only access the most popular markets by minimizing their lofty scholarly ambitions and producing only the

²¹ Laud to Convocation, OUA SP/D/1/9. Privilegium at potestatem imprimendi Sacra Biblia, Psaltera, Grammaticas, et omnis generis Libros qui ad ornatum Rei pub: Literarine conducere possint.

²² Laud, *Remains*, 58.

²³ John Feather, "Learned Press in a Commercial World," in *History of Oxford University Press, Vol. I*, ed. Ian Gadd (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 247.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 248.

²⁵ David McKitterick, *A History of Cambridge University Press, Vol. I: Printing and the Book Trade in Cambridge, 1534-1698*, 205-206.

most basic pedagogical works. Clearly, London readers had little interests in the learned manuscripts of the Bodleian archives.

Laud's efforts illustrate the recognition on the part of university authorities that the popular presses were deficient. He emphasized the necessity of scholarly review and political censorship to the operation of his learned press. He mandated, as codified in his 1632 patent from King Charles, that all printed books be "approved by the judgement of the Chancellor...or his deputy and three Doctors, of whom at least one is to be a Doctor of Sacred Theology."²⁶ Laud's anxiety about unreviewed and unscholarly work expressed a common concern amongst the university-educated toward the "Babel" permitted by an expanding population of readers, which welcomed unlearned voices—writing in indecorous grammar—to discuss issues appropriate only to the scholarly.²⁷ His oversight took the form of direct censorship of volatile political and theological positions. In the case of one of the press' only prominent publication, Laud instructed his reviewer, Dr. John Prideaux, to alter the arguments of Chillingworth's *Religion of Protestants* to critique the "Church of Rome" rather than the "Church of England" before it could receive the university's imprimatur.²⁸ To Laud, the popular presses permitted religious heterodoxy, political sedition and improper editorial conventions, hence why he established such a robust system of review and censorship. He could not maintain this system, however, considering that the printers to the university, Litchfield and Turner, continued to print protestant theological texts contrary to Laud's Arminianism.²⁹ Both Cambridge and Oxford presses succumbed to more widely

²⁶ "Patent to the University of Oxford (12 November 1632) trans. Simon Neal," in *The History of Oxford University Press, Vol. I: Beginnings to 1780*, ed. Ian Gadd (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 654.

²⁷ Sharon Achinstein, "The Politics of Babel in the English Revolution," *Prose Studies* 14, no. 3 (December 1, 1991): 30.

²⁸ Laud, *Remains*, 128.

²⁹ Harry Graham Carter, *A History of the Oxford University Press, Vol. I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 35.

profitable and less scholarly publication schemes, while Oxford specifically failed to elevate its printing above the common “Babel.”

Laud’s vision of the learned press proved not only untenable but, in the eyes of critics, antithetical to the principles of a common public sphere. The censored politics and obscure scholarly languages which he valued—most notably in his effort to secure type for “oriental languages” for publication of such texts—became common points of criticism for authors writing against such “pedantisme.”³⁰ It may not be coincidental that an injunction against “the hindering of godly books to be printed, the blotting out or perverting those which they suffer, all or most of that which strikes either at Popery or Arminianism” soon follows the call for reforming the universities in the Root-and-Branch Petition.³¹ What Laud and later defenders of the universities saw as superior in the learned press, authors such as Dell, Milton and several others saw as potentially seditious and deleterious to the public sphere. In the process of broad political reform in the 1640s and later in the 1650s, those critical university-educated authors would advocate to dismantle the institutions which propagated such dangerous precedents. The polemic of the reform authors against the universities required readers to accept a difference between those within the institutions and those outside—between the learned and the unlearned.

The readers who engaged with reformist texts did not always learn such distinctions from these authors, however. Rather, a proliferation of popular didactic and scientific manuals, from guidebooks to almanacs to “books of secrets,” underlined the distinction by specifically

³⁰For the competition for “oriental” publication and typefaces, see Laud, *Remains*, 79; Alastair Hamilton, “The Learned Press: Oriental Languages,” in *History of Oxford University Press, Vol. I* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 400–402.

³¹ Gee and Hardy, “The Root and Branch Petition (1640).”

appealing to unlearned, uneducated and barely literate people.³² These texts castigated “book-learning” as an unnecessary prerequisite for their own consumption and understanding, and thereby allowed their readers to identify in contrast to such a learned status. Some writers of almanacs, for example, would refrain from including Latin epigraphs or citations in order to “appear less pretentious” to the less literate, according to Louise Hill Curth.³³ Moreover, these popular texts often occupied the same book catalogues and, in some cases bookstalls, as more technical and scholarly works.³⁴ In this way, readers who encountered this variety of texts would learn how to discriminate between books intended for their consumption and those intended for the learned. Authors, printers and booksellers guided this process by manipulating the understood symbols of erudition or an avowed lack thereof.

While the drastic increase in the production of almanacs and guidebooks “remade learned knowledge for the unlearned,” according to Natasha Glaisyer, they also often decried the identifiable conventions of learned literature.³⁵ Many claimed to provide knowledge which otherwise had been known only as “secrets” to scholars, astronomers and doctors, but did so “not with flowers of eloquence” as some assured customers.³⁶ In addition to advertising to an audience decidedly unaffiliated with the universities, these texts both implicitly and explicitly illustrated the superfluity of the learned conventions, and of the learning required of scholars to understand more sophisticated texts. By distilling and presenting practical information on astronomy, medicine and agriculture without “eloquence,” they implicitly challenged the very

³² For didactic literature, see Natasha Glaisyer, “Popular Didactic Literature,” in *Oxford History of Popular Print Culture, Vol. I* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011); for scientific literature, see Simon Schaffer, “Science,” in *Oxford History of Popular Print Culture* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011).

³³ Louise Hill Curth, *English Almanacs, Astrology and Popular Medicine: 1550-1700* (Manchester University Press, 2007), 42.

³⁴ Schaffer, “Science,” 401.

³⁵ Schaffer notes that one seller, William Lilly, sold 30,000 almanacs per year during the Civil War, and nearly 400,000 per year by Restoration, “Science,” *Oxford History of Popular Print Culture, Vol. I*, 402; Glaisyer, 517.

³⁶ John Playford, *A breefe introduction to the skill of musick* (London: 1654), quoted in Glaisyer, 517.

necessity of technical scholarly style. Explicitly, this literature ridiculed the book-learning that set other readers apart from their own readers as “pedantry” - an accusation which Adrian Johns has described in this period as a signifier of extensive knowledge of literary references without any practical utility – a point to which we shall return in the following chapter.³⁷ Considering the copious publication and consumption of these books, many of which directly or indirectly identify their readers within a learned or unlearned class, it is understandable that some reform writers who extolled the uneducated and criticized the pedantic scholar found a wide readership. They highlighted this distinction between learned and unlearned, which readers had already used to navigate the spectrum of didactic and scientific printed materials, and provoked the former’s political anxiety toward the latter.

2.3 PEDANTRY, PRIVACY AND PRESTIGE IN THE RHETORIC OF REFORM

The criticism of the universities and the conventions of scholarly discourse which they taught drew from political motives to some degree. Laud’s general unpopularity as Archbishop and advisor to Charles I could not have placed the university over which he presided positively in the eyes of Parliamentary supporters. Oxford’s reputation became only more polarizing after Charles’s flight from London in 1642, when the city itself became the seat of the royalist court and military until its capture in June of 1646. No doubt, the outpouring of royalist ephemera and

³⁷ Adrian Johns, “Prudence and Pedantry in Early Modern Cosmology: The Trade of Al Ross,” *History of Science* 36 (1998): 25.

polemic from the Oxford press of John and Leonard Litchfield at the time contributed to the university's odious reputation in the eyes of Parliamentarians.³⁸

Nevertheless, a simple equivocation between Parliamentary politics and sweeping critiques of the universities cannot capture the complexity of the rhetoric of reform. Not only do the reform schemes take different from writer to writer, but they span the most fundamental political divide. Thomas Hobbes criticized the universities, alongside Milton and even more strident reformers, for many of the same threats to the public sphere. Hobbes, never a supporter of the Parliamentary cause, saw these “fountains of civil and moral doctrine” as institutions that needed to be made “pure, both from the venom of heathen politicians, and from the incantation of deceiving spirits.”³⁹ Even the university dons and college masters who responded to the criticisms acknowledged the learned sphere which their opponents' rhetoric targeted, and often embraced its exclusiveness. What unifies these otherwise disparate authors is the concern in their rhetoric toward the inscrutability brought about by scholasticism, Aristotelianism, Latin, Greek and all forms of “pedantisme” which might threaten the public sphere.

Three common contours of this rhetoric recur across the diverse calls for and against different reform schemes. They take the form of accusations against the culture of universities and their conventions of communication. They all can be interpreted within a particular religious, political or socio-economic discourse, but each is most generally understood as a symptom of the anxiety about a distinct sphere of writing and reading. Specifically, they charge the universities with using “unintelligible” language; with reading and writing in a “monkish” and private fashion; and with garnering ‘false authority’ by their ritual displays of learning. These

³⁸ Jason Peacey, “Printers to the University,” in *History of Oxford University Press, Vol. I* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011), 68.

³⁹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (New York, NY: Barnes and Noble, 2004), 452.

accusations and their implications are not specific to this particular literature of university reform either, but can be seen in other areas of debate as well.

2.3.1 “Mere Babbling Schools”

The term “unintelligibility” is not one common to the reform writers themselves, though it does appear in Hobbes’s discussion of the universities.⁴⁰ It does, however, describe several different types of criticisms of the universities, all of which regard their language variously as “canting,” “jargon,” “ragged notions and babblements,” and “perfume acceptable to the nostrils of the world.”⁴¹ These charges against the universities and the scholars who inhabited them took several ambiguously distinguished forms.

For some critics, the any usage of Greek and Latin in print proved a necessary mark of pedantry and obscurity. Samuel How, writing in his anti-episcopal tract of 1640 (republished in 1644 and 1655), *The Sufficiency of the Spirit’s Teaching*, distinguishes a “humanely learned” man from a “common man” by their respective knowledge of these specialized languages. He categorizes “knowledge...of divers Tongues,” along with that of “Arts and Sciences” as the contents of humane learning, and explains, “For we in common speech doe oppose a learned man to one that otherwise can read and write in his own tongue though he doe not understand the grounds of his own speech, as the other man that is learned doth.”⁴² The value of teaching these

⁴⁰ Thomas Hobbes, *Behemoth, or the Epitome of the Civil Wars of England*, ed. William Molesworth, vol. VI, The Collected Works of Thomas Hobbes (London: John Bohn, 1840), 217.

⁴¹ Peter Burke, “The Jargon of the Schools,” in *Languages and Jargon*, ed. Peter Burke and Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 22–23, 30–34; The first two can be found in Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (New York, NY: Barnes and Noble, 2004), 444, 24; the third can be found in John Milton, “Of Education, To Master Samuel Hartlib (1644),” in *The Portable Milton*, ed. Douglas Bush (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1955), 139.

⁴² Samuel How, *The Sufficiencie of the Spirits Teaching without Humane Learning*, 232:E.25[16], 1644, *Early English Books*, 3.

languages became a contentious issue primarily in the debate on the education of the so-called “learned clergy.” The more strident opponents of the university-educated clergymen, such as How and Dell, decried the use of Latin and Greek as “perfume acceptable to the nostrils of the world” - only to appeal to others within the learned sphere and exclude the population.⁴³ The defenders of the learned clergy accepted this argument from the opponents, and rather insisted on the necessity of a distinctly scholarly audience for some sermons. Joseph Sedgewick, a fellow of Christ’s College, Cambridge, responded to reformist accusations by accepting that Greek, Latin and Hebrew usage in sermons delivered to a “meer popular Audience” was “vanity,” but not so if the “great part of the heareres understand it,” and thereby benefit from the original languages.⁴⁴

This mark of the learned, however, was not often seen as a subversive force in itself. Several university-educated reformists accepted some value in learning the classical languages, but objected to the exclusive and elite pedagogical method by which it was taught to some and not the many. The Cambridge-educated poet John Hall, addressing Parliament in his reform plan of 1649, *Concerning the Advancement of Learning and the Reformation of the Universities*, asks, “Where a survey of Antiquities, and learned descants upon them? Where a ready and generous teaching of the Tongues? Free from Pedantisme, and the impertinencies that that kind of learning hat been pestered with?”⁴⁵ Hall’s colleague and fellow Cambridge alum, John Milton, lamented in his 1644 letter to Parliament’s education reformer Samuel Hartlib that in the pedagogical status quo, “Latin and Greek maxims” are “wrung from poor striplings, like blood out of the

⁴³ Dell, *The Tryal of Spirits Both in Teachers & Hearers...*, 31.

⁴⁴ Joseph Sedgewick, *A Sermon, Preached at St. Marie’s in the University of Cambridge May 1st, 1653. Or, An Essay to the Discovery of the Spirit of Enthusiasme and Pretended Inspiration, That Disturbs and Strikes at the Universities*, Thomason Tracts / 108:E.699[2] (London, 1653), *Early English Books*, 6.

⁴⁵ John Hall, *An Humble Motion to the Parliament of England Concerning the Advancement of Learning, and Reformation of the Universities* by J.H. (London:1649), *Early English Books Online*, 28.

nose.”⁴⁶ Milton’s Ramist-inspired reform proposal would limit Latin and Greek instruction to only one year each, so that students would not be alienated by the arduous curriculum and be “grown into hatred and contempt of learning.”⁴⁷ In both accounts, then, the university-educated reformists agreed on the utility of the classical languages, but objected to the exclusiveness of the languages through obscure rights of scholarly passage.⁴⁸

Authors of some reformist tracts inextricably associated this advocacy for more simple and accessible language pedagogy with the need to rewrite academic terminologies so that they become grounded in actual “things,” as Peter Burke has described this recurring strain of seventeenth-century anti-scholastic rhetoric.⁴⁹ Sharon Achinstein interprets this notion of a confused and ambiguous language, in which words lose established meanings and lead to political turmoil, as a learned response to the emergence of popular political writing. The proliferation of “opinion,” in her account, spurred the call following the Restoration for a formalized and explicit “Universal Language,” like that of John Wilkins.⁵⁰ While this explanation may account for some of the more learned sentiments toward the writing in the public sphere, it can also be reversed to represent the rhetoric of those critics of Aristotelian scholarly terminologies. Milton expresses this double meaning in Achinstein’s notion of popular “Babel” most explicitly when he claims:

And though a linguist should pride himself to have all the tongues that Babel cleft the world into,
yet if he have not studied the solid things in them as well as the words and lexicons, he were

⁴⁶ Milton, “Of Education, To Master Samuel Hartlib (1644),” 138–139.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 139; For Milton’s reform proposal in Ramist tradition, see the analysis in Kearney, *Scholars and Gentlemen*, 51–63.

⁴⁸ For further analysis of the comparative accessibility and the possibilities of social mobility through the Ramist curriculum, see Howard Hotson, *Commonplace Learning: Ramism and Its German Ramifications, 1543-1630* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 67–68.

⁴⁹ Burke, “The Jargon of the Schools,” 30–34.

⁵⁰ Achinstein, “The Politics of Babel in the English Revolution,” 14.

nothing so much to be esteemed a learned man as any yeoman or tradesman competently wise in his mother dialect only.⁵¹

With this claim, Milton makes explicit the distinction drawn by How in 1640, namely, that a learned man can only be called such when he knows both the English tongue and the “grounds” of the words he speaks. In Milton’s formulation, however, it is not the yeoman or merchant whose speech is meaningless and unfounded, but rather the scholar versed in all the languages of “Babel.” Without the grounding in actual things, he is no more learned than the commoner.

These criticisms usually targeted Aristotelian and Scholastic terminologies, and deemed them “emptie,” “scholastic grossness,” “trumpery.”⁵² Against peripatetic jargon, the otherwise more measured tones of the university-educated critics turned to more volatile invective. They charged this language as exclusive insofar as it was arbitrary. Because the Aristotelian and scholastic terminologies did not relate to the “solid things” of the world, they could not be understood as if they did meaningfully refer to particular things. Hall enumerates those scholastic terms, which he very probably encountered in his own schooling, and criticized their instruction, describing a “jejune barren Peripatetick Philosophy, suited only (as *Mounsieur Des-Cartes* sayes) to wits that are seated below Mediocrity, which will furnish them with those rare imaginations of *Materia prima*, *Privation*, *Universalia*, and such Trumpery, which they understand no more than their Tutors.”⁵³ Insofar as this learning was without basis in the world, it was criticized throughout much of the literature for its absolute lack of social utility.⁵⁴ Without such “grounds”

⁵¹ Milton, “Of Education, To Master Samuel Hartlib (1644),” 137–138.

⁵² The first can be found in Snell, *The Right Teaching of Useful Knowledg, to Fit Scholars for Som Honest Profession...*, 3; the second from Milton, “Of Education, To Master Samuel Hartlib (1644),” 139; the third from Hall, *An Humble Motion to the Parliament of England Concerning the Advancement of Learning, and Reformation of the Universities by J.H.*, 26.

⁵³ Hall, *An Humble Motion to the Parliament of England Concerning the Advancement of Learning, and Reformation of the Universities*, 26.

⁵⁴ For a more thorough treatment of ‘social utility,’ see 3.3 below.

which he demanded of the learned, and the universities who taught them, Milton in 1659 characterized the universities as “mere babbling schools, fed at public cost, good for nothing else but what was good for nothing.”⁵⁵

Though he sat contrary to Milton in the range of political commitments within this reform literature, Hobbes echoes Milton’s blistering critique of the universities, and decries their scholastic curriculum as not only useless but patently seditious to the wellbeing of the commonwealth. In his *De Cive*, published in France in Latin in 1642 and as *Philosophical Rudiments Concerning Government and Society* in English in 1651, Hobbes establishes a distinction between two forms of “eloquence.” When it is an “elegant and clear expression of the conceptions of the mind; and riseth partly from the contemplation of the things themselves, partly from an understanding of words taken in their own proper and definite signification,” then it is useful and admirable.⁵⁶ But when “separated from that true knowledge of things,” then that eloquence becomes a tool to “stir up the people to innovations.” That is how otherwise loyal subjects following the doctrines of the scholastics can “cooperate to the disposing of subjects minds to sedition, whilst they teach young men a doctrine comfortable to the said opinions in their schools, and all the people in their pulpits.”⁵⁷ Insofar as the scholastic doctrine relied on terms which had no grounding in a “knowledge of things,” then its disciples and their students could only teach the empty eloquence which is useful strictly to incite “sedition.”

While this association between scholastic discourse and societal faction appears predominantly in the context of the university reform debate, it is not a charge unique to the

⁵⁵ John Milton, *Considerations Touching the Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings out of the Church*, Thomason Tracts / 241:E.2110[2] (London: T. N., 1659), 148–149.

⁵⁶ Thomas Hobbes, *Philosophical Rudiments Concerning Government and Society*, ed. William Molesworth, vol. II (London: John Bohn, 1841), 161–162.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, II:163. The Latin original: Ad disponendum civium animos ad seditiones, multi etiam eorum qui bene erga civitatem affecti sunt, dum dictis opinionibus confinem doctrinam adolescentibus in scholes, & omni populo e cathedris insinuant, per inscitiam cooperantur.

reformers. Those who defended the universities accused the reformers of employing an equally empty, divisive language in their writing. Sedgewick, the fellow of Christ's College, subverts the criticisms of scholastic and humane language by reciprocating them against Dell and his colleagues. He claims that such critics "use words of deceit, subtilty and ambiguity," and proceeds to undermine Dell's critiques, asking, "How do these men love to walk in the clouds, to speak above the understandings of men, off and on, with an industrious kind of confusion? is this the plainnesse and simplicity of a Gospel-preacher?"⁵⁸ He continues to mock Dell, by associating the latter's misuse of ambiguous theological terms with a young student first failing to grasp the arts curriculum which Dell so strongly opposes, musing, "It's just as these men as with a young scholar of Logick, who thinks that he is come into a new world, never observing that it's the newnesse of terms onely, but that the conceptions were naturall."⁵⁹ Concern for plain and meaningful speech was so ubiquitous in the public sphere that any writer addressing his readers knew to appeal to this anxiety about obscurity.

The scholastic terminology which received the brunt of the criticism, however, did not remain statically fixed at the center of the Oxford or Cambridge curricula in the course of the mid-17th century. As Mordechai Feingold has described, seventeenth-century critics of their own university education often highlighted the Peripatetic backwardness of their institutions, while missing the intellectual diversity and curricular change which took place at Oxford and Cambridge at the time.⁶⁰ This "selective memory" recalls the popular and contemporaneous criticisms levelled against unintelligible Aristotelianism, perceived as the hallmark of the

⁵⁸ Sedgewick, *An Essay to the Discovery of the Spirit of Enthusiasme and Pretended Inspiration, That Disturbs and Strikes at the Universities*, 10.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Mordechai Feingold, "Mathematical Sciences and the New Philosophies," in *History of the University of Oxford, Vol. IV: Seventeenth Century Oxford* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1997), 359–361.

universities. John Webster thoroughly rebukes the “Approved Scholastik Learning” of the universities in his 1654 critique, *Academiarum Examen*, and proposed major reforms in their place.⁶¹ Speaking from within the contemporary university establishment, Savilian Professor of Astronomy Seth Ward penned a response in which he chastises both Webster and Hobbes for representing the universities as “tyed up to the Dictates of Aristotle...Which is so notoriously false, that I should very much wonder with what confidence he [Webster] could suppose it, if I did not finde Mr. Hobbs likewise guilty of the same mistake.”⁶² If Ward is to be believed, perceptions of universities, even from those experienced in their curricula, could not accurately depict the obscured sophistication of the universities. Nevertheless, since the universities served as surrogates for the popular debate on unintelligibility and scholarly elitism within the public sphere, the more accurate institutional history of the colleges’ curricula is less relevant for establishing their perception amongst the populace.

2.3.2 “A Monkish Life in Popish Cloisters”

This obscurity which shrouded the activities of the universities from popular scrutiny contributed to the second recurring theme of this rhetoric, namely, the implications of the “private” nature of scholarly reading, teaching and writing. The distinction between “public” and “private” is central to the notion of a public sphere, and historians working in that tradition identify the two terms as they were used in seventeenth century for polemical purposes. The

⁶¹ John Webster, *Academiarum Examen, or The Examination of Academies.*, E4:1[269c] (London, 1653), *Early English Books Online*, 3.

⁶² Seth Ward, *Vindiciae Academiarum Containing Some Briefe Animadversions upon Mr Websters Book Stiled, The Examination of Academies : Together with an Appendix Concerning What M. Hobbs and M. Dell Have Published on This Argument.*, Early English Books, 1641-1700 / 44:03 (Oxford: Leonard Lichfield, 1654), 1–2. This debate is more thoroughly discussed in Allen Debus, *Science and Education in the Seventeenth Century: The Webster-Ward Debate* (New York: Macdonald and Co., 1970), 37-49.

political connotations of the words did not remain static, but rather changed from the Elizabethan through the early Stuart and Interregnum periods.⁶³ Nevertheless, the notion of privacy within later Elizabethan humanist literature held long associations with the *via contemplativa*—the “life of contemplation”—which defined the life of the university scholar and, later, the educated country gentleman.⁶⁴ In the Ciceronian tradition so influential for the Elizabethan humanists, to “withdraw into solitary contemplation, could be regarded as an ‘uncivile kind of life,’” according to Richard Cust. By the Interregnum, the term “private” took on the volatile political implications which accompanied it in the early Tudor period. What took place in private was seen as “illicit, secret, or seditious,” according to Adrian Johns.⁶⁵ Just as those characterizations followed from the unintelligibility of scholarly discourse, so they followed from the privacy and solitude in which scholars lived and worked.

Critics levelling the accusations of “privacy” at the universities usually specified the private nature of scholarly writing and reading itself. The quintessential solitude of academic study was equated with the monastic lifestyle so vilified in England following the dissolution of the monasteries.⁶⁶ Webster, in his *Saint’s Guide* of 1654 wrote that all revenue to the universities goes to “maintain an hive of Drones, Wasps and Hornets in their Monkish Cells.”⁶⁷ The school reformer John Dury echoed this sentiment when he stated, in his *Supplement to the Reformed*

⁶³ Ricahrd Cust, “The Public Man in Late Tudor and Early Stuart England,” in *The Politics of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁶⁵ Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 128–129.

⁶⁶ It is noteworthy that Dell, in his brief historical accounts of Oxford and Cambridge, traces the origin of both institutions to monks. He recounts that “Cambridge was instituted, Anno. 630. By Sigisbert King of the East Angles, who after changed his Purple or Kingly Robes for a Fryars Cool or Hood. And the Lectures here were begun by four Monks....And for Oxford, that was founded by King Alfred, Anno 895, by the Perswasion of Neotus the Monk...” in “A Plain and Necessary Confutation of Divers, Gross and Antichristian Errors....” in *The Tryal of Spirits*, 45.

⁶⁷ John Webster, *The Saints Guide, Or, Christ the Rule, and Ruler of Saints.*, Thomason Tracts / 109:E.710[26]; (London, 1653), *Early English Books Online*, 1, 5.

School of 1654, that universities ought not instill a “monkish life in popish cloisters.”⁶⁸ To these reformers, “private” scholarship, with its solitude and obscurity, had no place in an England free of papacy and monasticism.

Critical writers contrasted the private activity typical of university scholars with the public activity of reading, preaching and writing which was so highly esteemed in the commonwealth. Whereas the learned read in private seclusion in their colleges, the consumers of printed criticisms of the universities were more likely to read aloud to those around them, illiterate or otherwise. In this way, reading took on a more public characteristic for those in London and in the towns.⁶⁹ This contrast in the ways of reading bore implications for the validity of the knowledge gained by the reading, and the authority of the reader himself.⁷⁰ How cites Biblical precedent in his 1640 tract against the learned clergy and their reading, claiming that St. Peter “declares that the Spirits interpretation, where it is, is a publique interpretation and not private, and that Men, though indued with great learning, having not the Spirit of God can give but a private interpretation according to the Apostles intent...”⁷¹ The necessity of “publique” display in religious interpretations discounted anything gathered by the private life of a scholar at the universities. Whereas readings, interpretations and arguments could be verified when delivered, they could not be trusted in private. The scholarly life of privacy, detached from the possibility of scrutiny in the public sphere, produced both epistemically problematic and potentially illicit knowledge.

⁶⁸ John Dury, *The Reformed Librarie-Keeper with a Supplement to The Reformed-School, as Subordinate to Colleges in Universities*, ed. John Pell, (London: William Du-Gard, 1650), *Early English Books Online*, 7.

⁶⁹ Jonathan Barry, “Literacy and Literature in Popular Culture: Reading and Writing in Historical Perspective,” in *Popular Culture in England, 1500-1800*, ed. Tim Harris (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 71–83.

⁷⁰ For an example of the requirement of “social” rather than “private space” for the legitimation of knowledge (considered as ‘matters of fact’), see Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton University Press, 1985), 55–67.

⁷¹ How, *The Sufficiencie of the Spirits Teaching without Humane Learning*, 33.

While this language primarily described the reading and writing habits of scholars, authors sometimes used it to further efforts to reform the administration and structure of the universities themselves. Just as the university-men worked individually in private, so too did the institutions themselves, insofar as their administration was largely unaccountable to Parliament and their decisions were not open to public critique and approval. John Hall makes use of the distinction in such a way, when he explicates his motivation to make university finances more transparent, explaining, “All our suit is, that these endowments and pious liberality, may be converted into uses suitable to the ends of the Donors, and tend rather to a publicke advantage, then to the private fostering of a many idle Pedantick Brotherhoods.”⁷² How Hall and his fellow reformists imagined such a “publicke advantage,” however, will receive its requisite attention in chapter 3.

2.3.3 “Such honorable esteem everywhere in the Nation”

The inscrutability of ‘private’ communication and administration within the universities posed acute dangers to the public sphere, and thus inspired the third common strain of rhetoric within the reform literature. Specifically, reformers argued that graduates and scholars garnered an illegitimate authority amongst the unlearned public, and could therefore unjustly sway popular opinion. This argument would seem contrary to the general distrust which Parliamentary documents such as the Root-and-Branch Petition and the Grand Remonstrance—supposedly representative of popular sentiment—expressed toward the universities.⁷³ The popularity evident

⁷² Hall, *An Humble Motion to the Parliament of England Concerning the Advancement of Learning, and Reformation of the Universities*, 17.

⁷³ *A Remonstrance of the State of the Kingdome of England Die Mercurii 15. Decemb. 1641* (London, 1641), *Early English Books Online*, 26–27.

from the frequent reprints of How and Dell's works speaks to some degree of public distrust of the universities.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, these writers wrote most urgently about the universities' undeserved public reputation as they perceived it. In 1653, Dell addressed the universities "which are of such honorable esteem everywhere in the Nation, especially with the Ignorant and Vulgar people, and with men of all sorts..."⁷⁵ How identifies the reputation and public authority which degree-holding scholars attribute to themselves, asking the reader, "Now he that hath these things, as *Humane-Learning* and Wisdome more than another, let him weigh and consider duly with himselfe, whether he doth not think and conclude that he in regard of these things is not more to be respected then they that are without them."⁷⁶

Dell and How both note how the universities' reputation grants degree-holders credibility amongst the "ignorant and vulgar," only because such people cannot understand the unintelligible and private institution through which degrees are granted. To Dell, this unearned respect results only from inability for the public to scrutinize the doctrines of the learned. There is no possibility for the critique and response common to popular writing in the public sphere, and this lack of criticism fosters an unjust authority, according to Dell. In his discussion of the "Dull and drousie Divinity of Synods and Schools," he locates the source of this undeserved authority, claiming:

It ['the dull and drousie Divinity'] meets with no enemies, and avengers amongst them, but it is rather praised and embraced, and honoured with degrees and scarlet, and the Professors and

⁷⁴ How's *Sufficiencie of the Spirit's Teaching* was reprinted in 1644, 1650 and 1655. Dell's *Right Reformation* was reprinted in 1650 and 1651, all according to the archives of *Early English Books Online*.

⁷⁵ Dell, "An Apologie to the Reader" in *The Tryal of Spirits Both in Teachers & Hearers...*, 3.

⁷⁶ How, *The Sufficiencie of the Spirits Teaching without Humane Learning*, 15.

Publishers of it are in credit with men, and worldly Powers, and receive from them riches, and honour, and quiet life.⁷⁷

In this invective, Dell levels two criticisms of scholarly authority. Because their accepted doctrines “meet with no enemies,” they cannot be granted public credibility, and rather require doctrine sufficiently accessible to the unlearned that it could be scrutinized at all. Second, he undermines the symbols of scholarship and learning themselves, namely, the “degrees and scarlet” of their academic regalia. In his other writings, Dell presses the same attack on such exterior displays of authority by ridiculing the accepted title of “Doctor” for revered scholars.⁷⁸ This criticism identifies a form of authority garnered less by the public’s ability to respond and criticize, and more by public ceremony and ritual, which Habermas identifies as “representative publicness.”⁷⁹ This form of ceremonial publicness, which preceded the textual public sphere, indicated “social status” and reinforced the authority of those elevated within the social hierarchy. This contrasts with the principles of the general public sphere which “disregarded status altogether” and where instead “the authority of the better argument could assert itself against that of social hierarchy,” according to Habermas.⁸⁰ For a reform author such as Dell, symbolic displays of scholarly authority, whether they be titles, regalia or even the occasional Latin phrase, could no longer hold a meaningful place in the critical public sphere.

To these diminutions of their academic credentials, the defenders of the university gave two responses. The Cambridge fellow Joseph Sedgewick, for one, justified the value of a

⁷⁷ Dell, *The Stumbling-Stone, Or, A Discourse Touching That Offence Which the World and Worldly Church Do Take Against...*, 19.

⁷⁸ Dell, *The Tryal of Spirits Both in Teachers & Hearers...*, 30.

⁷⁹ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 8–9.

⁸⁰ Ibid.; Steven Pincus has written specifically about this environment as it existed in the English coffeehouses of the mid to late seventeenth century, and how such a sphere also disregarded differences in gender, see Pincus, “‘Coffee Politicians Does Create’: Coffeehouses and Restoration Political Culture,” *The Journal of Modern History* 67, no. 4 (December 1, 1995): 834.

university degree not as a mere token of ritual display, but rather as a “civil constitution, and a publick witnesse given to approved and known learning. (So they should be and were intended).”⁸¹ Sedgewick accepts that the degree carries “publick” authority over all who witness, but only on the grounds that it signifies something “approved” and “known.” Those who approve such knowledge constitute the “men that are in all probability best able to judge of progresse of learning.” Insofar as those men would be the scholars of the universities, ‘private’ from public oversight, then such accreditation would prove only self-justificatory and irrelevant to Dell and his fellow critics.

While Sedgewick’s response justified the meaningfulness of degrees to those in the public sphere, Robert Boreman, a fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, denied the need for academic accountability to critics and those readers not properly initiated into the university. In his 1653 response to Dell, the *Triumph of Learning over Ignorance*, Boreman sets down a blistering attack on the credibility of writers like Dell, who emerged from the universities to criticize them, and on Dell’s unlearned readers:

Especially now that little birds, scarece fledgd or hatcht flying with their shells upon their heads, and having only a feather or two of boldness in their faces, shall dare and that in the bosome of their Nurse or Mother preach or rather prate against Learning, which they never had, and inveigh against Universities, *qua tales*, simply as Universities, of which they never deserved to be members.⁸²

For Boreman, it is the fact that the critics of the universities are not properly learned in scholarly culture which necessarily discredits them, in complete contradiction to Dell’s argument that a closed and ‘private’ community discredits its doctrine. Boreman supplies a more forceful

⁸¹ Sedgewick, *An Essay to the Discovery of the Spirit of Enthusiasme and Pretended Inspiration, That Disturbs and Strikes at the Universities*, 7.

⁸² Robert Boreman, *Paideia Thriamous. The Triumph of Learning over Ignorance, and of Truth over Faleshood.*, Thomason Tracts / 105:E.681[10] (London: R. Royston, 1652), *Early English Books Online*, 2.

argument in this passage, contending that Dell and the other university-educated critics forfeit their learned status insofar as they spurn their “Nurse or Mother,” Oxford or Cambridge. Strong criticism of the universities, even from their own initiates, becomes discounted and loses credibility within those institutions. On this point, both Dell and Boreman fundamentally agree.

This assumption shared by both the detractors and the defenders of the university, that the *status quo* maintains one learned sphere distinct from a public sphere, bound writers from different political and confessional commitments into a shared discourse on scholarship and its role in the commonwealth. A common language of “public” approval, credibility and legitimacy emerged from these disparate debates, and would define the contentious debate on the reimagined university system. While the rhetoric against the “pedantisme” of the universities expresses this layer of commonality, the positive reform suggestions which accompany them evince diverse and conflicting paths toward a reformed university education that could prove appropriate to the expanding public sphere.

3.0 REIMAGINING AND REFORMING UNIVERSITIES IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Within a year of his resettlement at Oxford, King Charles had attracted the censure of the university's Chancellor and his administrators. Since his arrival in 1642, the King had granted an unprecedented number of honorary degrees from the university to loyal supporters and officers.⁸³ The Chancellor politely reminded the King in a letter that honorary degrees should not be granted superfluously, lest the practice detract from the "glory (which hath made her famous and honorable throughout Christendome)."⁸⁴ Charles recognized how this "glory" reflected on his own Kingdom, and assured the Chancellor that he would cease the practice.⁸⁵ The university convocation knew that to successfully appeal to their monarch they must accentuate the honor, fame and majesty of their own institution.

Fifteen years later, the Oxford convocation wrote another humble petition, this time to their new governing body in London, the Parliamentary Committee for the Reform of the Universities. They requested the permission to appoint their own Chancellor after the passing of their effective Chancellor, Oliver Cromwell. The language, however, differed from that employed in their letter to the King. They explicitly assured Parliament that their decision would prove "to the abundant satisfaction of the state."⁸⁶ No longer could the "glory" and prestige of

⁸³ For partial list of degrees granted, see List of Honorary Degrees Granted, 1642, OUA SP/F/40/3.

⁸⁴ Chancellor to King Charles, 1643, OUA SP/F/40/9.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Convocation to Committee for the Reform of the Universities, 1658, OUA WPy/22/1e.

the institution sway political opinion and policy. The university, rather, conformed to the increasingly prevalent political perspective that saw the universities as *public* institutions, responsible to the state in certain distinct ways.⁸⁷

3.1 THE REFORMED UNIVERSITY AND THE NATIONAL INTEREST

The recurring rhetorical strategies and pervasive arguments from the texts considered in the last chapter illustrate how strident critics and moderate defenders of the universities alike acknowledged the political significance of a public sphere and the exception which Oxford and Cambridge posed to it. These communicative practices did not serve only to criticize or defend the status quo of university curricula, infrastructure and access, however. Reformists relied on arguments appealing to “public” and “national interest” to reimagine the universities as institutions which could and ought to benefit the entire community of their readers, regardless of their social or economic standing. These appeals to the “nation” and its sustenance as a community lent normative force to positive reform schemes which often fundamentally conflicted with one another.⁸⁸ Those communicative practices that identified a public sphere in the minds of readers and writers, then, defined a new way of discussing the universities and the education which they ought to provide for the benefit of the commonwealth. In the process of articulating novel visions of university curricula and infrastructure which would supposedly

⁸⁷ For one of the sparse documents internal to the university from the Interregnum and how it reiterates this notion of ‘public’ accountability, see Cromwell to Convocation, OUA WPy/22/1f, in which Cromwell recommends the university’s charity for a lapsed Irish Catholic student, stating, “it will be an act of charity and kindnesse to the poore stranger, soe it may redound to the good of the public and rest.”

⁸⁸ Geoff Baldwin, “The ‘Public’ as a Rhetorical Community in Early Modern England,” in *Communities in Early Modern England: Networks, Place, Rhetoric* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 205.

serve the entire spectrum of readers in the public sphere, however, reform writers actually expressed fundamentally incompatible perspectives on the contents of a “useful” university education. These perspectives corresponded closely with distinct socio-economic groups and the educational aspirations which shaped their perceptions of the universities throughout the Elizabethan and early Stuart periods. Writers regularly referred to the competing interests which different demographics of matriculants brought to the universities, and undermined opposing reform proposals by situating them within the interests and ambitions of particular classes of students. This kind of criticism characterized salient categories of reform proposals as expressions of certain class-based interests, and thereby discredited their claim to represent the interests of the nation as a whole.

As contributors to the literature of university reform transitioned from critical invective against the ancient universities to popular appeals for positive reform, they introduced a vocabulary of communicative practices to invoke the authority of the public sphere. Primary amongst these is the rhetoric of the “nation” as a unified community of readers with common interests. While the term “nation” had surely been applied to England and its crown prior to the Civil War, the volatile word took on a more fixed meaning in the absence of any monarch during the Interregnum. Geoff Baldwin argues that the term “nation” came to be understood during the Civil War to indicate the English reading public itself.⁸⁹ The individuals who constituted such an aggregate may have had individual interests and affairs, but they shared some common interests with all of their countrymen. The reform authors addressed those common interests by evoking

⁸⁹ Ibid, 200. Baldwin specifically argues that, “During the crisis in the middle of the seventeenth century there was a gradual shift to a conception of the public as an aggregate of people who made up a particular community: that of the whole nation.” Herbert Grabes gives a similar interpretation of the use of the term ‘nation’ and attendant national sentiments in that period in Herbert Grabes, “Introduction: ‘Writing the Nation’ in a Literal Sense,” in *Writing the Early Modern English Nation: The Transformation of National Identity in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. Herbert Grabes (Rodopi, 2001).

the English nation, and indeed her rival nations on the Continent, to establish the universities and the education they provided as institutions answerable and profitable to all readers.

To underline the national imperative to university reform, writers often juxtaposed England's infrastructure for higher education against those of other nations, thereby appealing to a sense of competition and security. George Snell, unfavorably comparing England's lack of educational accessibility to her rivals in 1649, laments, "all Christian Nations (England and her dominions excepted) caus the liberal Arts, the Laws, and all other useful knowledg to bee collegiately taught, in anie good village, most convenient for the Countrey."⁹⁰ Other authors underlined the diplomatic dangers that this discrepancy posed to England as a nation. Milton in 1644 proposed that with a more robust system of primary and higher education, "we would not need the monsieurs of Paris to take our hopeful youth into their slight and prodigal custodies and send them over back again transformed into mimics, apes, and kickshaws."⁹¹ William Dell considered consequences for England's pride against a different national rival in 1653, asking "what will be more illustrious in the History of *Holland*, then their high and visible cares, and almost prodigall magnificence for learning."⁹² We can better understand how these authors conceived of their own English "nation," then, by considering those whom they recognized as rivals.

England's rivals and competitors in university education did not always constitute linguistically or politically unified nations, such as the French or Dutch, according to some writers. Some targeted the Catholic Church, specifically the missionary Jesuits, as the primary intellectual threat against whom the English must prepare their students. John Hall identified the

⁹⁰ Snell, *The Right Teaching of Useful Knowledg, to Fit Scholars for Som Honest Profession...*, 257.

⁹¹ John Milton, "Of Education, to Master Samuel Hartlib (1644)," in *The Portable Milton*, ed. Douglas Bush (New York: Penguin, 1955)

⁹² Dell, *The Tryal of Spirits Both in Teachers & Hearers...*, 28.

“Jesuits Colledge and many transmarine universities” as the rivals which the English universities must defeat to attract their students.⁹³ Hugh Peters, writing in 1651, described the Jesuits’ concerted efforts to attract talented students to their universities, which should urge the English universities to appeal to students of “godliness,” rather than “wits.”⁹⁴ Boreman, the fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, professed an acute anxiety about Jesuits and their efforts to “Destroy the Universities, and with them the Ministry and Religion.”⁹⁵ In his pamphlet, Boreman proceeds to dramatically depict the English universities as militant training grounds against the intellectual incursion of the papacy, where students “learne to whet their Tongues in disputes against the Truth’s adversaries, those of Rome, together with other Hereticks.”⁹⁶

Such writers maintained the rhetoric of the English nation and its interest in preserving university education, and equated their readership’s spiritual health with their national security. Boreman’s characterization of the Jesuit conspiracy against the English church and commonwealth supplied ample justification to maintain and support the universities against their perceived detractors, allowing him to argue:

To prevent all these fatall mischiefes, draine not (but rather encrease with augmentations) the Fountaines of Learning and Religion; if these be once dried up, a drowth of truth will follow...when Barbarisme and Atheisme with other horrid impieties shall abound in this Land, and overthrow the Church, whose welfare is contained (together with the Common-wealth) in the preservation of Learning, Arts and Sciences.⁹⁷

⁹³ Hall, *An Humble Motion to the Parliament of England Concerning the Advancement of Learning, and Reformation of the Universities*, 28.

⁹⁴ Hugh Peters, *Good Work for a Good Magistrate Or, a Short Cut to Great Quiet. By Honest, Homely Plain English Hints given from Scripture, Reason, and Experience, for the Regulating of Most Cases in This Common-Wealth. Concerning Religion; Mercie; Justice.*, Thomason Tracts / 179:E.1364[2] (London: William Du-Gard printer to the Council of State, 1651), *Early English Books Online*, 6.

⁹⁵ Boreman, *Paideia Thriamou. The Triumph of Learning over Ignorance, and of Truth over Faleshood. Being an Answer to Foure Quaeries. Whether There Be Any Need of Universities?*, 2.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

Boreman and Peters both explicitly bound together the fates of the English religion and the national government, so that any university which would serve the interests of the public would provide both for its spiritual and material defense. Peters formulated the dual nature of the universities' ultimate purpose as a framework to begin positive reform, claiming "For the End, it is generally agreed, that it should bee the preparing and fitting younger people for som service, in reference to their Countries not for studying to determine in studying; especially in tendencie to spiritual or civil good; commonly called Ministrie, or Magistracie."⁹⁸ If the Jesuit colleges and the Dutch universities alike trained England's future rivals, both civil and spiritual, then England's universities would only fulfill their obligations to the nation by fitting students for a robust bureaucracy and ministry alike.

Not every commentator with visions of university reform agreed with Peters' formulation of the public obligations of the university, however. By 1659, Milton forcefully rejected any ministerial obligation on the part of the universities, and relegated spiritual edification to the private household. To Peters' proposal and those with similar aspirations, he answers "that what learning either human or divine can be necessary to a minister, may as easily and less chargeably be had in any private house."⁹⁹ Since religious instruction can and should be transmitted privately, according to Milton, the universities hold no public obligations to train a ministry against any national threat to religion. Despite the substantive differences between Peters' and Milton's reforms, however, their rhetoric reveals a shared body of assumptions about the ideal reformed university, specifically, that any education which redounds to the national interest and which cannot flourish within the walls of private households ought to fall within the purview of the university. They only contradict one another insofar they sharply diverge around the central

⁹⁸ Peters, *Good Work for a Good Magistrate Or, a Short Cut to Great Quiet.*,5.

⁹⁹ Milton, *Considerations Touching the Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings out of the Church*, 136–137.

question which dispersed reform proposals in the Civil War and Interregnum: What kind of education is, by its nature, *public* education? And what education could train students to effectively address “*public* concernments”?

To consider the contours of the debate on this question, we must consider how contemporary writers themselves discussed the notions of national interests and public institutions. One finds the most explicit excursus on the university as an institution for public interests in Cressy Dymock’s *Essay for the Advancement of Husbandry Learning* and the adjoined preface written by Samuel Hartlib from 1651. The prominent education reformer penned the preface to establish the conceptual foundations of a public institution of higher education. He introduces his explanation by recounting how individuals can “become joyntly serviceable unto one another in publicke concernments,” specifically, by employing their God-given private “advantages” and “talents” to address poverty and other “calamities” of the nation.¹⁰⁰

Hartlib and Dymock agree that colleges and universities prove ideal institutions to direct private talents toward public purposes since they “have been & are exceedingly *Advantagious* (if rightly ordered) for the *Improvement* of the *Talents* of those that betake themselves thereunto.” The talents and capacities, according to Dymock, increase considerably at the universities because the universities themselves form a type of public, in which individual approaches to the “Arts” can be shared, taught and made more “rational, easie, & really effectual & beneficial.” At Dymock’s ideal college of husbandry, for instance, students would learn from one another the most effective means for sowing seeds, planting gardens and breeding pigs and sheep according

¹⁰⁰ Samuel Hartlib and Cressy Dymock, *An Essay for Advancement of Husbandry-Learning, Or, Propositions for the Errecting Colledge of Husbandry and in Order Thereunto for the Taking in of Pupills or Apprentices, and Also Friends or Fellowes of the Same Colledge or Society.*, Early English Books, 1641-1700 / 1307:30 (London: Henry Hills, 1651), 2A.

to “rational rules” rather than the “unfound, rather Customary” ways to which they were disposed.¹⁰¹ Having been exposed to the marketplace of public scrutiny, the individual practices and advantages of the various arts optimally redound to the “advancement and encrease of publique plenty and welfare.”¹⁰²

Hartlib and Dymock’s proposal cannot be read as a definitive, uncontroversial statement on the specific function of the ideal public institution. As will be seen below, their primarily materialist account of public “calamities” and usefulness would not find universal agreement amongst reformists. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to note the two salient ways in which these reformists conceived of public educational institutions. First, they described how private advantages and practices could, and indeed should, be directed to address public concerns (whatever those might be). Second, they considered the exchange of practices at the uniquely public space of the universities as a rationalizing and normative process, in which disparate practices and beliefs would yield to a rational outcome through open dialogue.¹⁰³ Many authors accepted that universities best served the nation’s interests when they taught a curriculum which advanced such “public” knowledge. They dissented when they considered what kinds of curricula that constituted, and what kinds of interests pressed upon the nation.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 8.

¹⁰² Ibid., 6.

¹⁰³ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 74. Habermas articulates how the aggregate “public opinion” could take on a normative force as a “rational” representation of individual interests.

3.2 EDUCATION “USEFUL AND SERVICEABLE TO THE COMMONWEALTH”

Though writers widely disagreed in their responses, they almost entirely agreed that the university which provided for the public interest would impart “useful” education. This term, defies categorization as a virtue within one particular scheme for university reform. Its ubiquity speaks to the rhetorical weight which it carried within the English reading public in the first half of the seventeenth century.¹⁰⁴ Writers sometimes applied the term relatively, as when Dell imagines a curriculum that is “usefull and serviceable to the Commonwealth,” or when Peters articulates “how the universities may be made useful...to the Advancement of Religion.”¹⁰⁵ Often, though, the term could stand alone as a general attribute of a worthwhile pursuit, as in the title of Geroge Snell’s reform proposal, *The Right Teaching of useful knowledg, to fit scholars for som honest Profession*, from 1649. The ambiguity inherent in “useful learning” or a “useful university” could encompass a wide range of sometimes inconsistent curricular schemes. Rather than recognizing “useful” as a descriptor for a type of curriculum or a set of practices, historians should consider the deployment of the term as one amongst many communicative practices that indicated that reimagined universities would serve the national interest, whatever that interest might be.

The claim to usefulness did not belong to any particular reformist camp, despite the historical accounts which have attributed the rhetoric of useful learning to Puritans, craftsmen, or

¹⁰⁴The OED records the first published appearance of the word in a travel account from Guiana in the 1599 edition of Richard Hakluyt’s *Principal Nauigations*. The term thereafter appears pervasively throughout the literature of the early seventeenth century, see “Useful, Adj. and N.,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed February 11, 2015, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/220640>.

¹⁰⁵ Dell, *The Stumbling-Stone, Or, A Discourse Touching That Offence Which the World and Worldly Church Do Take Against...*, 27–28; Peters, *Good Work for a Good Magistrate Or, a Short Cut to Great Quiet.*, 3.

some single academic discipline.¹⁰⁶ The recognized meanings of the volatile word shifted throughout the seventeenth century, and historians have begun to trace the contingent and sometimes contradictory associations which the word evoked. Peter Harrison recounts the prevailing view of “useful knowledge” throughout most of the seventeenth century as that education which allowed “moral formulation, virtuous human action, and social welfare.”¹⁰⁷ That meaning took on a more controversial character following the Restoration, according to Harrison, when it came into conflict with the Royal Society’s notion of usefulness grounded in material invention, and less so in moral uprightness.¹⁰⁸ Harrison’s narrative of conflicting accounts opens the possibility for further analysis of these contentious meanings, and an examination of the university reform literature reveals considerable dissent about the proper contents of useful learning beginning in the Interregnum, rather than in the Restoration.

The dissent which surrounded the ideal curriculum for useful learning indicates the currency which “usefulness” carried amongst mid-seventeenth century readers, and which contrary accusations of particularity and “pedantry” bore, as well. Reform writers discredited contrary claims to useful learning by associating their curricular and structural proposals with interests specific to certain socio-economic classes, rather than those common to the public as a whole. Peters and fellow clergymen considered their ministerial curricula as “useful to the advancement of religion” and the commonwealth as a whole, while Milton branded the

¹⁰⁶For the Puritan interpretation, see Charles Webster, *The Great Instauration: Science, Medicine and Reform, 1626-1660* (Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1976), 189; For a perspective on the “usefulness” which attracted students to study geography, see Lesley B. Cormack, *Charting an Empire: Geography at the English Universities 1580-1620* (University of Chicago Press, 1997), 16.

¹⁰⁷ Peter Harrison, “Truth, Utility, and the Natural Sciences in Early Modern England,” in *Science, Literature and Rhetoric in Early Modern England* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2007), 23. For an account of the sophisticated meanings of ‘utility’ and ‘usefulness’ in the early seventeenth century, see Brian Vickers, “Bacon’s so-called ‘Utilitarianism’: Sources and Influence,” in *Franics Bacon: Terminologia E Fortuna Nel XVII Secolo* (Rome: Edizione dell’Ateneo, 1984).

¹⁰⁸Harrison, “Truth, Utility, and the Natural Sciences in Early Modern England,” 26–27. See in particular the dispute between Meric Casaubon and Joseph Glanvill for a crystallization of this debate.

theological education in the universities as only privately advantageous to a clerical cohort. He chastised clerical students for their claims to public recognition, remarking, “it needs must be mechanic and uningenuous in them to bring a bill of charges for the learning of those liberal arts and sciences, which they have learnd (if they have indeed learnd them, as they seldom have) to thir own benefit and accomplishment.”¹⁰⁹

The class of clerical students to which Milton refers formed a substantial portion of the matriculants at the universities in the first half of the seventeenth century, and maintained distinct curricular priorities which other university students could have easily recognized. This context elucidates how readers could have recognized Milton’s accusation that the clerical curriculum amounted to little more than self-serving “pedantry.” These priorities come into clearer relief against the diverse educational aspirations which other discrete groups of students carried with them to the universities in the same period, and which regularly conflicted. These aspirations, which correlated with the socio-economic origins of the students that held them, created a university environment which “fulfilled a dual or even triple function in society,” according to Rosemary O’Day.¹¹⁰ This university environment, with its multiple functions for diverse demographic groups, proved the ideal ground both to foster conflicting claims of curricular usefulness and to provide a basis for class-based rhetoric for decrying competing proposals. To understand this rhetoric, it is necessary to examine the shifts in student demographics which brought contrary conceptions of useful education into contact and, by the 1640s, competition for the claim to represent the national interest.

¹⁰⁹ Milton, *Considerations Touching the Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings out of the Church*, 131.

¹¹⁰ Rosemary O’Day, *Education and Society, 1500-1800: The Social Foundations of Education in Early Modern Britain* (Longman, 1982), 110.

3.3 SHIFTING DEMOGRAPHICS AND COMPETING CURRICULA AT THE UNIVERSITIES, 1560 – 1642

3.3.1 Middle-Sort Students

The concept of the ‘middle sort’ has enjoyed consistent historiographic attention in the past two decades.¹¹¹ Since historians of early modern English culture abandoned the Marxist opposition amongst “working class,” “bourgeois” and “aristocratic” the middle sort and its cultures have been accepted as a salient category of historical analysis.¹¹² Historians have considered how common social and economic experiences granted identifications within the group their contemporary currency. The members of the group, which generally encompassed yeomen, shopkeepers, merchants, artisans and some husbandmen, shared similar experiences in their work and social life. Jonathan Barry has described them all “trading with the products of their hands...or with skills in business or the professions” and doing so independently, without renting their labor to another.¹¹³ The exigencies of these diverse occupational statuses bound their members to certain mutual experiences, including those at grammar schools and universities.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Keith Wrightson, “Estates, Degrees and Sorts: Changing Perceptions of Society in Tudor and Stuart England” P. J. Corfield, ed., *Language, History, and Class* (Oxford, UK ; Cambridge, Mass., USA: B. Blackwell, 1991); Jonathan Barry and C. W. Brooks, *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society, and Politics in England, 1550-1800* (St. Martin’s Press, 1994); H.R. French, *The Middle Sort of People in Provincial England 1600-1750* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). H. R. French, “Social Status, Localism and the ‘Middle Sort of People’ in England 1620-1750,” *Past & Present*, no. 166 (February 1, 2000): 66–99.

¹¹² Tim Harris, “Popular, Plebeian, Culture: Historical Definitions” in *Oxford History of Popular Print Culture, Vol. I*, ed. Joad Raymond (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011), 54.

¹¹³ Barry and Brooks, *The Middling Sort of People*, 2.

¹¹⁴ Adam Fox “Food, Drink and Social Distinction in Early Modern England” in Christopher Brooks, “Apprenticeship, Social Mobility and the Middling Sort, 1550-1800” in *The Middling Sort of People*, 52–83.

While historians have made ample use of the category, it is unclear how frequently Britons applied the term to themselves or to others. Keith Wrightson dates the term's first frequent usage to the Civil War and Interregnum, though social commentators applied the term as early as 1603.¹¹⁵ H.R. French approaches the term more skeptically, cautioning that "there is extraordinarily little evidence of 'middling' people laying claim to this identity themselves."¹¹⁶ He argues that the limited range of "organizational" situations in which middling people would have had to identify themselves as such belies the category's utility for an historical understanding of self-identity and common culture. In comparison with "gentry," whose status secured certain political and institutional privileges, "middle sort," then, would not have been a class whose members readily defined themselves as such.¹¹⁷ He specifically cites the lack of "formal social bars" within educational institutions, which could have otherwise forced an identification on the part of middle-sort students. Within the universities, however, incoming students had to identify themselves within a rigid scale of class categories in matriculation books, each corresponding to an appropriate matriculation fee and certain social privileges. These privileges ranged from the retention of fellow students as servants, to permitted attire and seating in the dining room.¹¹⁸ The language of class distinction within universities constantly reminded students of their status, contrary to French's analysis.

Beyond these internal university regulations, the middle sort's access to education and their experience within educational institutions distinguished them as a relevant demographic represented in the university reform literature. Sons of the clergy and gentry who studied at the university

¹¹⁵ Keith Wrightson, "Estates Degrees and Sorts: Changing Perceptions of Society in Tudor and Stuart England" in *Language, History, and Class*, ed. Penelope J. Corfield, 49. Wrightson cites an 'Apologie' for the city of London printed by John Stow as the earliest text to encompass urban merchants, artisans and laborers as 'middle place.'

¹¹⁶ French, *The Middle Sort of Seople in Provincial England 1600-1750*, 16.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹¹⁸ Stephen Porter, "University and Society," in *History of the University of Oxford, Vol. IV: Seventeenth Century Oxford* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1997), 36-37, 51-53.

associated the middle sort with “mechanical” education, so as to deprive them of any claim to worthy or “useful” learning, as the following sections will make clarify. A longer history of the demographic shifts within the universities and the grammar schools which guarded access to them can explain the tension which the middle sort faced against their fellow matriculants beginning in the late Tudor period, from 1560 to the beginning of the Civil War.

Lawrence Stone labelled this period in English educational history, from 1560 to 1640, the “Educational Revolution,” and historians have disputed his label ever since.¹¹⁹ Stone cites an increase of roughly 900 percent in the number of endowed grammar schools across ten counties, from 34 to 305, between 1480 and 1660—and an even greater increase in private, fee-collecting schools.¹²⁰ This proliferation of schools in urban and semi-urban communities expanded access to the grammar schools which would prepare students to enter the universities, but it did not do so equally. The poorest sons of laborers and husbandmen still often faced prohibitive tuition costs for entrance, regardless of the few lucky enough to secure a scholarship. Cressy’s literacy statistics, compiled by the analysis of signatures, evinces how the pedagogical fortunes of the expanding educational infrastructure overwhelmingly fell on the gentry and those demographics within the middle sort.

Those fortunes extended beyond the grammar school, and in the last decades of the sixteenth century, more students from the middle sort matriculated to the universities. Evaluating the socioeconomic status of universities has posed a harrowing task for historians of this period, in part because matriculants registered in one of typically five categories, “peer,” “esquire,”

¹¹⁹ Lawrence Stone, “The Educational Revolution in England, 1560-1640,” *Past & Present*, no. 28 (July 1, 1964): 41–80; For a moderated version of Stone's hypothesis, see David Cressy, “Educational Opportunity in Tudor and Stuart England,” *History of Education Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (October 1, 1976): 301–20.

¹²⁰ Stone, “The Educational Revolution in England, 1560-1640,” 44.

“gentleman,” “clerical” and “plebeian.”¹²¹ Each paid a matriculation fee corresponding to their status, such that plebeians and clerical sons paid the lowest—two shillings and six pence during the 1640s. The peers paid roughly five times that amount.¹²² The correspondence between these gradations and the language of “sorts” has been marred not only by a skew in matriculants’ responses, but also by an ambiguous terminology for class common in the secondary literature. All students self-reported their statuses, so the declared class only represented the student’s perception of his own class in relation to his peers. This understanding of class would differ regionally as well, and so the records yield no direct equivalence between the matriculation ranks and the schema of “sorts.”¹²³

Nevertheless, the broad category of “plebeians” would presumably apply to any of the occupational categories considered as the middle sort in the present study. Merchants, tradesmen and all but the wealthiest yeomen would not have readily considered themselves gentlemen for the purposes of matriculation, so it is appropriate to presume that the plebeian category included the vast majority of middle-sort students, in addition to some of the lesser-gentry who sought reduced fees.¹²⁴ Considering that revised relationship between the “plebeian” and the middle sort, the entire body of secondary literature concurs that the latter demographic saw a considerable increase in collegiate matriculation beginning in the 1570s.¹²⁵ Throughout the 1580s, “plebeians” accounted for 50 percent of the student population at Oxford, due in part to the affordability of attendance with the assistance of scholarships, “servitorships” and

¹²¹ Porter, “University and Society,” 35–37; Bodleian OUA SPF 37 records these rolls in their Latin titular abbreviations, thus: ‘Baroniensi,’ ‘Armigeri,’ ‘Generosi,’ ‘Minister’ and ‘Plebei.’

¹²² Bodleian OUA SPF 37

¹²³ Porter, “University and Society,” 50–53.

¹²⁴ Lawrence Stone, “Size and Composition of the Oxford Student Body,” in *The University in Society*, vol. 1 (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1975), 19–20.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

“sizarships,” both of which obligated the recipient to work as a servant for wealthier, aristocratic students.¹²⁶ This increase in matriculation closely parallels two coincident trends in educational demography. First, the expanded access to grammar schools insured that the increasing proportion of middle-sort students would go up to the university in roughly equal measure. Cressy’s study of a Colchester grammar school, for example, revealed that the proportions of grammar schools students born of various occupational demographics, from gentlemen to merchants to clergy, closely approximated the same proportion that went on to Cambridge at the same time.¹²⁷ Second, the growing representation of wealthier sons of the landed gentry within the universities’ student body also allowed more students of comparatively humble origins to matriculate and pay their way as “servitors” or “sizar” to the wealthy.¹²⁸ Through the late sixteenth century, the influx of the landed gentry and the middle sort into the universities complemented one another.

The limited economic means of the middle-sort matriculants required them to rely on university scholarships and the foundation, or to sell their labor to wealthier students. Access to university education depended not only on sufficient grammar school education and alumni networks, but also on available charitable funds. By the Interregnum, some university reformers had recognized this impediment to students of more modest means, and sought actively to dismantle it at public expense. Reform writers proposed sweeping reforms of university infrastructure to expand access to talented students, acutely aware of the boundaries to educational access which these students received. John Hall cited classical precedent to illustrate

¹²⁶ O’Day, *Education and Society, 1500-1800*, 100; Stone, “The Educational Revolution in England, 1560-1640,” 67.

¹²⁷ Cressy, “Educational Opportunity in Tudor and Stuart England,” 311.

¹²⁸ Stone, “The Educational Revolution in England, 1560-1640,” 68; O’Day, *Education and Society, 1500-1800*, 100; Morgan and Brooke, *A History of the University of Cambridge*, 119, 132.

the public benefits which accrue when children “born amongst the dregs of the people, without any such high hopes” acquire education, citing how the Theban statesman Epaminondas, though he emerged from a “vulgar womb,” had “owed all his orient vertues to the light of the Schools.”¹²⁹ Such examples furthered his fundamental argument that the commonwealth stood to benefit from the investment in an “abundance of natural wits” from all economic backgrounds, who would maintain republican principles and who would “every day bud forth with some invention, serviceable either to the necessities of the poore, or grave magnificence of the rich.”¹³⁰ To increase access to the middle-sort students to whom such rhetoric referred, Hall and fellow reformists not only advocated for public maintenance of talented scholars, but also for the withdrawal of support for the competing clerical class of students.

3.3.2 Clerical Students

The social mobility possible with a university degree in the late sixteenth century attracted the middle sort, who recognized the opportunity to ensure their sons benefices in the episcopacy or positions in the bureaucracy through their education. As more students continually matriculated to the universities in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, the universities could provide more sons of the middle sort and clergy equipped with prestigious B.D. degrees for the episcopacy. In Surrey, for instance, the percentage of beneficed clergymen who held a degree increased from 30 to 69 percent between 1581 and 1603; in London, that number reached 75

¹²⁹ Hall, *An Humble Motion to the Parliament of England Concerning the Advancement of Learning, and Reformation of the Universities*, 8.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

percent.¹³¹ This “educational inflation” in clerical training rendered the B.D. degree less of a competitive advantage for senior positions in the episcopacy, and more a necessary credential for pastoral ministry. The stream of graduates who swelled into this glut of potential clergymen almost invariably emerged from “plebeian” and clerical reservoirs. The overabundance of clerical degrees from these demographic backgrounds not only elevated the average level of education within the pastoral ministry, but also produced ‘itinerant’ B.D. and even M.A. holders in the first two decades of the seventeenth century, who travelled from town to town, reduced to sermonizing and lecturing without any benefice.¹³²

The increasing supply and stagnating demand for the “learned clergy” assured closer competition for clerical appointments and the academic credentials which would make them accessible. Beginning in the last decade of the sixteenth century, first-generation clergymen, who had seized benefices after benefitting from the expanding university access to middle-sort sons, manipulated their remaining networks to university fellows in order to grant their sons access.¹³³ Their efforts proved successful, as the matriculations for clerical sons began increasing in the first decade of the seventeenth century, while those for plebeian sons decreased.¹³⁴ These efforts solidified an increasingly nepotistic clerical profession, who could pass their hotly-contested credentials from generation to generation. O’Day has traced the contours of this clerical profession by studying matriculation records, wills and eulogies to uncover the close familial and professional networks which linked clergymen. Clergymen frequently provided for their sons’ university education in their wills, due in part to “family tradition,” and in part to the difficulty of

¹³¹ Rosemary O’Day, “Universities and Professions in the Early Modern Period,” in *Beyond the Lecture Hall: Universities and Community Engagement from the Middle Ages to the Present Day* (Cambridge England ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 21.

¹³² Mark H. Curtis, “The Alienated Intellectuals of Early Stuart England,” *Past & Present*, no. 23 (November 1, 1962): 25–43.

¹³³ Morgan and Brooke, *A History of the University of Cambridge*, 324.

¹³⁴ O’Day, *Education and Society, 1500-1800*, 105.

obtaining preferment without the proper credentials.¹³⁵ Other private documents attest to the shared experiences which bound clergymen and their associates from the university, including classmates and fellows, in close friendship and mutual respect.¹³⁶ All of these common practices provided the inheritors of clerical dynasties with significant advantages when seeking episcopal and pastoral positions, and led to the demographic group's overrepresentation in the profession. As this group enjoyed its connections to the universities and its influence on their curricular priorities, the non-clerical sons of the middle sort found themselves marginalized both in the church and in the colleges.

By considering this context, we can begin to elucidate some of the anticlerical rhetoric which pervaded so much university reform literature. Several writers expressed an acute awareness of the marginalization which middle-sort students faced when competing for spots with well-connected clerical sons. This anticlerical rhetoric not only criticized the proliferation of clerical students, but the dominance over the curriculum which they supposedly maintained. John Hall ensured Parliament in his petition of 1649 that an education befitting a republic would uplift “lower born men,” though in the status quo, the clerical “drones” barred these men from the universities. He details how talented students, “were by such Drones as these kept out of the Hives, and either forced to feck their food from afar, or else sit downe (unlesse provided for by their Parents) with no other gaine by their Philosophy and Reason, then a few Stoicall sentences in the contempt of wealth, and the commendations of poverty.”¹³⁷ William Sprigg even identified the nepotism which unfairly delivered clerical students into the colleges and

¹³⁵ Rosemary O'Day, *The English Clergy: The Emergence and Consolidation of a Profession, 1558-1642* (Continuum International Publishing Group, Limited, 1979), 161.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 163.

¹³⁷ Hall, *An Humble Motion to the Parliament of England Concerning the Advancement of Learning, and Reformation of the Universities*, 8, 17.

foundations, and excoriated those networks and the rhetorical education which perpetuated them in the same invective. He explains, "Others by the perswasive Rhetorick of Arguments tip'd with silver, together with the mediation of some great and powerful firends of the Candidates, by which means is purchased the favour of being registered in the Golden Legend of the little Popes memory, as a Saint Canonized for the next office or preferment."¹³⁸ In both instances, the authors condemned together the undue representation of clerical students and the ministerial education they received, defined as it was merely by "Stoicall sentences" and "perswasive Rhetoick." By associating the curriculum and the clerical students, the opponents of ministerial education could both condemn the dominance of the clergy in the universities and ground any arguments for the "advancement of religion" in the interests of a particular professional class.

Some advocates for ministerial education in the universities responded to their anticlerical counterparts with the same arguments. They decried the education in industrial and agricultural trades that authors like Dymock, Hartlib, Hall and many other reformists proposed for the universities. The Minister Thomas Blake found scriptural justification in rejecting the proposals of the anticlerical authors and their industrial curricula, expounding, "A School for Tongues, and Arts, cannot be a shop for Trades, Can we think those Sons of the Prophets that studied under Elisha, or those Prophets under Samuel, had their employments of manufacture or tillage."¹³⁹ One gleans from Blake's exegesis the implication that universities ought not only to keep trades and crafts from the curriculum in order to fulfill their scriptural role, but ought also

¹³⁸ William Sprigg, *A Modest Plea, for an Equal Common-Wealth, against Monarchy.*, Thomason Tracts / 225:E.1802[1] (London, : Printed for Giles Calvert, at the Black Spread-Eagle, at the west end of Pauls, 1659., 1659), 60.

¹³⁹ Thomas Blake, *Vindiciae Foederis, Or, A Treatise of the Covenant of God Enterd with Man-Kinde in the Several Kindes and Degrees of It, in Which the Agreement and Respective Differences of the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace, of the Old and New Covenant Are Discust ...* 1641-1700 / 1499:09, *Early English Books* (London : Printed by Abel Roper, 1658), 176.

to keep those who “find their employments of manufacture and tillage” out of the matriculation rolls.

Defenders of clerical education had recourse to positive arguments for the usefulness of their curricula, as well. In the same way their critics hoped to elevate “mechanical” knowledge to a unique status both for its amelioration of public concerns and for its accessibility and scrutability, supporters of clerical education emphasized the public need for pastoral sermonizing and its capacity to publically elucidate otherwise obscure Scripture. Their justifications in favor of clerical education maintained the same structure as those of their ‘mechanical’ counterparts. Hugh Peters and many of his contemporaries in the clergy repudiated the “monastic privateness” which critics had decried as the foundation of clerical education in the status quo.¹⁴⁰ Hugh Peters underlined the public nature of appropriate religious education in contrast to this monastic image, arguing “Colleges properlie are the meeting of men for the hearing Lectures, and improving their parts, not wals to contein monastick drones; and so lose the ends of other mens bounties, as of their own precious time.”¹⁴¹ The obligation to public sermonizing instilled an acute concern with clarity and “plainness” when explaining Scripture to the laity, and the universities could provide ideal spaces to train individuals in this public function. Peters himself proposed a tutorial system by which experienced preachers might exemplify the “memory,” “judgment” and “will” all required for “publick reading the scripture.”¹⁴² By these individual talents and rhetorical practices, the preacher might employ his private “gifts” for the useful task of public scriptural edification. The minister Thomas Blake explained the usefulness of such clerical education thus,

¹⁴⁰ See 2.3.2 above.

¹⁴¹ Peters, *Good Work for a Good Magistrate Or, a Short Cut to Great Quiet.*, 5.

¹⁴² Ibid., 8. For a thorough discussion of the largely ‘Puritan’ literature on ‘plain sermonizing,’ see John Morgan, *Godly Learning: Puritan Attitudes Towards Reason, Learning and Education, 1560-1640* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 121–142.

that “the plainnesse and easinesse of a rule, and the use of means for understanding of it stand together.”¹⁴³

The concern for the public understanding of scripture emerged in part from a distinct theological conception of the Fall and the requirements of man’s subsequent return to grace. Historians and literary scholars of early modern England have written considerably about these same theological underpinnings for the justification of “mechanical philosophy” and experimentalism.¹⁴⁴ But just as fallen man was forced to labor in the natural world to return to paradise, so too did he have to labor in the sometimes densely difficult Scripture to return to a more perfect understanding. Blake explains this dual obligation and the role which universities play in fulfilling them in his *Vindicia Foederis*, claiming:

Since the judgment was laid on the earth for sin, men have got their bread with labour, and so must as long as the judgement remains. The like paines must be for learning as for a living; When God shall please to poure out again these fiery streams, we then shall confesse the unusefulness of Schools to this purpose, in the mean space their use is evident. And seeing it is acknowledged that *men must digge with daily study, and labour to come at the Original fountaines....*¹⁴⁵

Schools and universities would prove themselves useful, then, by facilitating the labor of “daily study” of scripture, so that it may be rendered as universally intelligible and understandable ‘rules.’ This notion of the university as a collection of laborers working to elucidate the mysteries of scripture for intelligible public consumption fits Joanna Picciotto’s picture of a

¹⁴³ Thomas Blake, *Vindiciae Foederis, Or, A Treatise of the Covenant of God Enterd with Man-Kinde in the Several Kindes and Degrees of It, in Which the Agreement and Respective Differences of the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace, of the Old and New Covenant Are Discust ...*, Early English Books, 1641-1700 / 1499:09 (London: Abel Roper, 1658), 179.

¹⁴⁴ Peter Harrison, *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Joanna Picciotto, *Labors of Innocence in Early Modern England* (Harvard University Press, 2010).

¹⁴⁵ Blake, *Vindiciae Foederis*, 177.

seventeenth-century public sphere —“that of a corporate body engaged in the labor of truth production” —composed, in her case, of experimentalists.¹⁴⁶

Though not all subscribed to this Adamic scriptural interpretation, the defenders of ministerial education at the universities asserted the usefulness of their curricula in the same way that Hartlib and Dury, for instance, could justify the usefulness of their college for husbandry. They insisted that the proper reading of scripture required public exegesis by ministers trained in the labor of theological interpretation and the art of intelligible sermonizing. This concept of an obscure scripture with an attendant class of biblical exegetes, expositors and other theological laborers precluded the possibility of biblical instruction in the “private household,” as Milton proposed, and solidified the clerical curriculum as a “public” kind of knowledge.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, the supposed threat of intellectual incursion by Jesuits, trained in their own universities to complicate and distance the scripture from its original purity, insured readers that the religious health of the nation constituted a “public concernment” in its own right.

Though these claims received ample scrutiny by critics of clerical education, they retained the same structure and adhered to the same fundamental criteria for “useful learning” as contrary writers. They also mirrored their opponents’ rhetoric by disarming rival curricular proposals with accusations of socio-economic particularism and private advantage. Yet another category of writers on the university retained a concept of publicness quite different from the clerical and anti-clerical reformers. Unlike their counterparts, they cited their distinct social status as a justification, rather than a discredit, of their curricular schemes.

¹⁴⁶ Picciotto, *Labors of Innocence in Early Modern England*, 5.

¹⁴⁷ See 3.1 above.

3.3.3 Gentry

The increase in matriculations in the 1620s and 1630s delivered a disproportionate number of clerical sons and gentry sons to the universities alike. It is more difficult for historians to glean a precise estimate of the number of students from the gentry, considering how gentle students would be less likely to officially record themselves as matriculants, since most did not intend to graduate with a degree.¹⁴⁸ The ambiguities of self-identification which have clouded historians' site of middle-sort students in the matriculation roles also complicate evaluations of the gentry, though to a lesser extent. While some lesser gentry might have found financial reasons to pay the lower fees of their peers from the "*plebei*," the vast majority would recognize their official status amongst the "*baronensi*" (peers), "*armigeri*" (armigers), or "*generosi*" (gentlemen).¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, historians record a general increase in the proportion of students from the gentry, particularly landed gentry, at both universities in the first decades of the seventeenth century.¹⁵⁰ A lucrative market for land and its attendant rents provided more students from the landed gentry with the economic means to fund university education without scholarships or financial assistance, according to Lawrence Stone.¹⁵¹

The motivations for the gentry to send their sons to Oxford and Cambridge vary, but the academic priorities of the students from this demographic reflect their disposition to the universities. On average, far fewer students from the gentry stayed to complete the degrees which clerical and middle-sort students sought out as credentials. At Cambridge between 1596

¹⁴⁸ Stone, "Size and Composition of the Oxford Student Body," 19–20.

¹⁴⁹ Bodleian OUA SPF 37

¹⁵⁰ For general increases in the gentry, beginning as early as the late Tudor period, see O'Day, *Education and Society, 1500-1800*, 97; For Cambridge, see Morgan and Brooke, *A History of the University of Cambridge*, 132; For Oxford, see Porter, "University and Society," 47–48.

¹⁵¹ Stone, "The Educational Revolution in England, 1560-1640," 71.

and 1645, only 34 percent of gentle sons completed degrees, compared to 77 and 83 percent of plebeian and clerical sons, respectively.¹⁵² Many of these students left at a considerably younger age than their plebeian and clerical peers to pursue careers in law at the Inns of Court or medicine, neither of which required the accreditation of a university degree.¹⁵³ Evidently, predetermined paths through particular career trajectories defined the experience of the gentry at the universities less than it did for their nongentle peers.

Throughout the late Tudor and early Stuart periods, courtesy books increasingly regarded university education, but not a university degree, as an inextricable component of gentle identity. In his popular and often reprinted guide, the *Compleat Gentleman* of 1622, Henry Peacham, “sometimes Master of Trinity College, Cambridge,” asserted that “Learning is an essential part of the Nobilitie,” and proceeded to grant a special place to education at the universities.¹⁵⁴ He considered the university the entrance to positions in the bureaucracy or the law courts which would grant “public” status to a young gentleman, and which would demand eloquence in speech and facility in classical *exempla*. He introduces his section on the university by expounding on the “public view” which first grasps the young gentleman when he enters university:

Since the Universitie whereinto you are embodied, is not untruly called the Light and Eyes of the Land, in regard from hence, as from the Center of the Sunne, the glorious beames of Knowledge disperse theselves over al, without which a Chaos of blindnesse would repossesseus againe: think now that you are in publicke view, and *nuncibus reliclis*, with your gowne you have put on the man, that from hence the reputation of your whole life taketh her first growth and beginning.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² O’Day, “Universities and Professions in the Early Modern Period,” 21.

¹⁵³ Porter, “University and Society,” 99–100. Porter shows how this trend left those professions markedly more dominated by sons from the gentry.

¹⁵⁴ Henry Peacham, *The Compleat Gentleman Fashioning Him Absolute in the Most Necessary & Commendable Qualities Concerning Minde or Bodie That May Be Required in a Noble Gentleman.*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 / 1283:22 (London: John Legat, 1622), 18. Peacham’s work was reprinted in 1627, 1634 and 1661.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

The curriculum that would best prepare the young gentleman for speaking and counselling in “publicke view,” according to Peacham, featured history prominently. Gentle students were expected to read “Universal histories” as “imitation in writing and speaking.” Students were to read widely in classical and contemporary historians so as to “gather this Hony of Eloquence, a gift of heaven, out of many fields.”¹⁵⁶ Peacham specifically vaunted Cicero, “in whose bosome the Treasue of eloquence seemeth to have been locked up,” and accepted the Ciceronian construction of the public man as a man of eloquence, who exploited close proximity to decision-making monarchs and administrators to direct policy.¹⁵⁷ The structure of instruction at Oxford and Cambridge in the period facilitated and encouraged tutors to tailor readings lists to the educational aspirations of their particular students. Gentle students often favored tutors who assigned works in classical and modern history which might equip them to speak in the “publicke view” of the law courts and administrative chambers.¹⁵⁸

The curricular recommendations and the actual career trajectories of gentle students at the universities suggests that the notion of publicness which Peacham and his gentle readers accepted differed fundamentally from the notion which Hartlib, Dymock, Blake and Peters offered in defense of their mechanical and clerical curricula. The public view which Peacham described required eloquent speech and persuasive rhetoric because that view occupied privileged locations within the political apparatus where such skills became common currency in conversation: Law courts, parliamentary chambers, the advisory councils of the monarch. Peacham specifically suggested that students study the proceedings of these institutions, which

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 44.

¹⁵⁷ Cust, “The Public Man in Late Tudor and Early Stuart England,” 118.

¹⁵⁸ O’Day, “Universities and Professions in the Early Modern Period,” 93–94; David McKitterick, *A History of Cambridge University Press*, vol. 1 (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 223.

might teach them more relevant rhetorical skills even than any history, recommending an alternative to the studies of the tutors:

Procure then, if you may, the Speeches made in Parliament, frequent learned Sermons, in Term time resort to the Starre-Chamber, and be present at the pleadings in other publique Courts, whereby you shall better your speech, enrich your understanding, and get more experience in one moneth, then in oter foure by keeping your Melancholy studie, and by solitarie studie.¹⁵⁹

These institutions facilitated discussion on public policy, law and the commonwealth in private, privileged spaces where access depended on the conversational conventions embedded in the gentle educational curricula. The law courts and councils permitted a unique level of open discussion while tightly restricting participation from those uninitiated in the standards of rhetorical decorum.¹⁶⁰ While the reading public was granted access to some parliamentary transactions in print in 1626, printed records from councils and law courts more often evaded the public eye, hence why Peacham insisted that students “be present” in public courts.¹⁶¹ This nominal notion of “public” discussion proved particularly appropriate for its gentle adherents. It was, nevertheless, consistent with common communicative practices deployed in competing accounts of publicness, specifically emphases on national interests and usefulness. A tract on the education of gentlemen written on the eve of the Restoration insisted that “A Man that hath this inward Nobility of Minde superadded to that of his Birth... hath those qualifications, which render him useful, and he must give himself those Exercises, whereby he may become the most eminently so. If by just authority he be assigned to any publick charge, he is to embrace it

¹⁵⁹ Peacham, *The Compleat Gentleman*, 53.

¹⁶⁰ Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture*, 52; Pincus and Lake, “Rethinking the Public Sphere in Early Modern England,” 5. Zaret opens the possibility that these spaces functioned similarly to public spheres, insofar as they allowed ‘positive consequences’ of debate.

¹⁶¹ Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture*, 45.

cheerfully.”¹⁶² University education and gentle birth, then, coupled to prepare a man for “useful” and “public” service to the nation.

While the gentry increasingly relied on the universities to instruct their sons in eloquence and introduce them to influential social networks, they also realized the threat which nongentle university students and their contrary educational aspirations posed. From Elizabeth’s reign through the Restoration, a substantial literature proposed conflicting criteria for gentle status, so much so that Steven Shapin claim that the contested criteria of gentility “more profoundly shaped English culture...than any other concern.”¹⁶³ An attendant increase in social mobility amongst the nongentle, sometimes through university education, threatened the stability of wealth or humane learning as discriminating criteria of the gentry. The presence of nongentle students earning degrees and attending the universities alongside the gentle undermined any association between gentility and learning which humanist scholars and courtesy books might have advanced. Moreover, it challenged the preeminence of the “liberal sciences” of rhetoric and classical languages in the university curriculum. In a printed petition to Parliament in response to the imprisonment of Archbishop Laud from 1642, a group of “Gentlemen and Students of the Universitie of Cambridge” expressed their anxiety about a changing curriculum, expressing “yet we hope the liberall Sciences, may bee as prevalent as the mechanical intruding, not with swords but knees, which had not yet bin bended but in this alone our impetration.”¹⁶⁴

To discredit the “intruding” university curricula, both mechanical and clerical, writers who advocated for the gentle curriculum decried their peers for their nongentle status and the

¹⁶² Richard Allestree, *The Gentlemans Calling*, Early English Books, 1641-1700 / 680:07 (London, 1660), 28.

¹⁶³ Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (University of Chicago Press, 1994), 56.

¹⁶⁴ Anon., *The Petition of the Gentlemen and Stvdents of the Vniversitie of Cambridge Offered to Both Houses* (London, 1642), Cambridge University Library, Univesity MS. PP 1/1,.

inferior epistemic capacity which supposedly attended it. Criticisms of “lowborn” men relied on an implicit association between common people and a considerably diminished intellectual or authoritative capacity. A body of contemporary courtesy literature associated common people with inheritable “animal natures” which infringed on their accurate perception of the world and their reasoning from facts.¹⁶⁵ These associations allowed university reform writers in the 1640s to explicitly criticize clerical and middle-sort students for their commonness and their incapacity to learn the appropriate curriculum and conventions of public life. In a printed critique against Archbishop Laud and his colleagues, the Parliamentary gentleman Robert Greville, Lord Brooke, levelled damning arguments about Laud and his incapacitating social origin:

For the most part he is *Ex faece plebis; humi-serpent;* of the lowest of the people (an old complaint.) Now for such a low borne man, to be exalted high, so high, and no *gradatim*, but *per saltum* too, as oft it is (in one of few, or no Schoole Degrees, which yet indeed at best are scare degrees to the Civill honour of a Peer;)” must needs make as great a Chasme in Politickes, as such leapes use doe in Naturalls.¹⁶⁶

The rhetoric of the gentry within the university reform literature consistently relied on criticisms of ministerial students’ lowly social status and the inappropriateness of their studies.¹⁶⁷ In the same tract, Brooke criticizes such “lowborne men” at the universities who “spend their time in Criticall, Cabalisticall, Scepticall, Scholasticall learning; which fills the head with empty, aerial notions, but gives no sound food to the reasonable part of man.”¹⁶⁸ The state support which ministerial students and their advocates petitioned for only signified their debased status, and

¹⁶⁵ Shapin, *A Social History of Truth*, 77–78. Shapin cites Sir Thomas Browne’s *Pseudoxia Epidemica* of 1646, which noted the “erroneous dispositions of the people” brought on by their “bad discernments of verity.”

¹⁶⁶ Robert Greville, Baron Brooke, *A Discovrse Opening the Natvre of That Episcopacie, Which Is Exercised in England Wherein with All Humility, Are Represented Some Considerations Tending to the Much Desired Peace, and Long Expected Reformation, of This Our Mother Church*, Early English Books, 1641-1700 / 256:E.177[22] (London: R. C., 1641), 3–4.

¹⁶⁷ Kearney, *Scholars and Gentlemen*, 91.

¹⁶⁸ Brooke, *A Discovrse Opening the Natvre of That Episcopacie*, 10.

accentuated the superficiality of clerical education. William Sprigg, who never explicitly identified as a gentleman though still relied on a discourse of lowborn incompetence, explained, "It is not a small thing will satiate the ambition of the English Clergie, who many of them, though taken from the meanest of the people, usually so much forget their Original, that they think the best preferments below their merits and capacities."¹⁶⁹ Such criticism insinuated that the lowly economic standing of clerical students compelled them into obscure studies, so that they might further professionalize and secure their much-needed preferments. Milton, Hall and others pressed the same fundamentally class-based arguments against clerical students, even if they never claimed the privilege of gentility for themselves.

While the anticlerical gentry and their allies in the university debate pressed an argument against the low status and inherent incompetence of the clergy, at least one defender of clerical education countered his gentle opponents' curriculum as "recreation" outside the national interest. Hugh Peters contrasted the clerical "warriors," preparing to defend the national religion, and the gentle students, at pleasure in a recreational course of study, asking,

Or why might not som of the numerous Gentry in their Countrey, studie, and either preach for nothing, or give Physick *gratis*, or advise in matters of Law freely? The Sins of *Sodom* creep upon us: and whilst our Souldiers are whetting their swords for the next battel, how manie are whetting their knives for the next feast? oh! why should anie make Recreation a trade?¹⁷⁰

The interlocutors in this debate argued on different grounds to advance the same fundamental claim: that their own proposed university curriculum proved more "useful" by satisfying a more pertinent public interest. How that public interest ought to be determined, however, differed significantly between the parties. The gentry, unlike the advocates for clerical

¹⁶⁹ Sprigg, *A Modest Plea, for an Equal Common-Wealth, against Monarchy.*, 39.

¹⁷⁰ Peters, *Good Work for a Good Magistrate Or, a Short Cut to Great Quiet.*, 12.

or mechanical education, cited their own elevated social position as a relevant factor for barring admission to the privileged public spheres for which their rhetorical education prepared them. Other university reform writers surrendered any claim to social particularity in their curricular proposals to insist that their advanced knowledge was itself public, insofar as any student — regardless of status—could contribute practices or ideas to advance the “reason” of the art itself. The literature of the reform debate during the Interregnum, therefore, presents the first instance when interlocutors reimagined the universities as institutions where social status might be levelled, and where rationalizing discussion might advance the public interest.

4.0 THE COFFEEHOUSE AND THE COLLEGE HALL: A PLACE FOR UNIVERSITY REFORM IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE?

The pamphlets and political treatises which emerged during the Civil War and Interregnum to reimagine and reinvent the universities would not, on first consideration, seem to matter either to historians of Oxford and Cambridge or to scholars of the early modern public sphere. On an institutional level, the reform literature failed to motivate substantive policy from Parliament, and the “duopoly” of Cambridge and Oxford over university education continued until the nineteenth century. Enrollment rates at both institutions failed to quickly recover from the considerable decrease during the 1640s and 1650s, and the universities waned in political, cultural and scientific significance beginning in the Restoration and throughout the eighteenth century.

As the universities declined in intellectual importance, the institutions of the public sphere, including coffeehouses and Continental salons, ascended. Habermas’s original periodization placed these two trends in parallel, and not as a coincidence. He specifically counterpoised the cultural criticism of Joseph Addison, the quintessential representative of the Restoration public sphere, with the antiquated “philosophy of the scholars.”¹⁷¹ Victor Morgan

¹⁷¹ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 43.

maintains this distinction in his history of Cambridge, claiming that amongst scholars after the 1670s, “Pedantic eloquence was held at a discount against scintillating wit. Moreover, in affairs of the mind there was a shift from institutionalised intellect to uninstitutionalised intellect...”¹⁷² In this formulation, universities appear as conservative relics, subsiding to the popularization of intellectual discourse in the public sphere which dragged them into modernity after much resistance. This would seem to render Oxford and Cambridge irrelevant to scholars of the public sphere, and the failed attempts at reforming the university immaterial to historians of the universities.

That supposed conflict between public discourse in the coffeehouse and private disputation in the college hall, however, masks the imaginative force and political significance of the literature of university reform. The previous chapters have illustrated how seventeenth-century writers and their readers articulated the normative force of the public sphere and “public concernments” through the rhetoric which they deployed to criticize and reimagine the universities. The reformed universities which they proposed exemplified the range of seventeenth-century notions of publicness, from open discourse on the interpretation of scripture or the sewing of crops, to a facility in rhetoric in the chambers of government. While these proposals did not materialize as college halls at the forefront of the expanding public sphere, they did extend a novel language for describing and discussing the universities, which would ultimately inform the trajectory of university policy and reform in the following centuries. Historians can therefore read the reform literature to better understand contemporary conceptions of the public sphere, and can consider the reimagined university halls alongside coffeehouses as spaces constitutive, or potentially constitutive, of the pre-Restoration public sphere in England.

¹⁷² Morgan and Brooke, *A History of the University of Cambridge*, 135.

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